ROAD HAULAGE ARCHIVE

BODY LANGUAGE

- COMMERCIAL VEHICLE BODIES FROM DROPSIDERS TO PANTECHNICONS

A pictorial survey of Commercial Vehicle bodywork from the 1920s to the 1970s featuring many previously unpublished photos from the archives.

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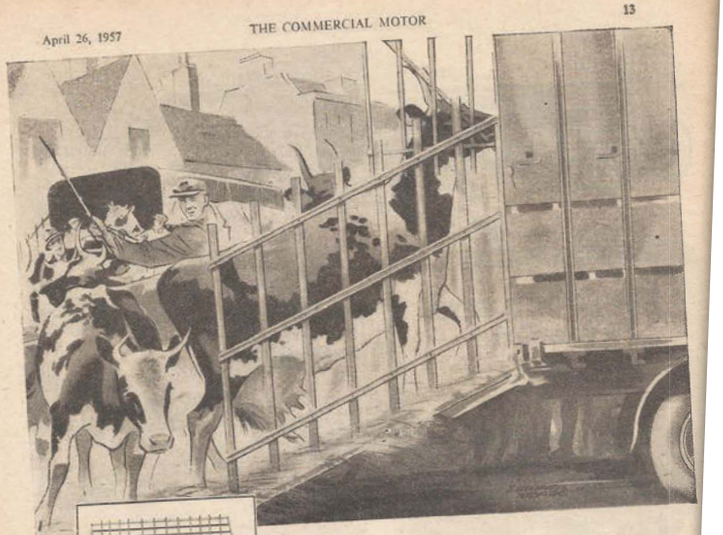

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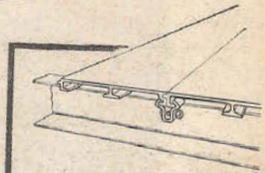

★ The floor of this Mammoth Major is constructed from tongued and grooved 'Duraplank', specially produced for super-heavy-duty work. In fixing it, no holes are drilled in planks or bearers (see sketch). The drop sides of the truck are made in three sections.

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ROAD HAULAGE ARCHIVE

BODY LANGUAGE

- COMMERCIAL VEHICLE BODIES FROM DROPSIDERS TO PANTECHNICONS

Why do the Commercial Vehicle chassis manufacturers get all the glory? Let's hear it for the manufacturers of bodywork - from flat platforms to complex exhibition and display units, there's sure to be one for every purpose....

On the face of it, there are few clues as to the location of this AEC 'Mercury' box van that has just gone into service with Bowyers of Trowbridge, except... Amazingly, 60 years after this official photograph was taken by AEC's photographer, we discover that 'Knee's Home and Electrical' has survived and is indeed still located in Trowbridge, Wilts – albeit today, not in a town centre shop, but on an out-of-town retail park. So that's the location sorted. We also know the Mercury rigid '4834 MW' was registered in 1961.

But what do we know about the bodywork? Not a lot as, typically, the information slip on the reverse of this press release picture doesn't tell us whether it is refrigerated – in which case it must have an underfloor fridge unit as none is fitted to the front bulkhead – or whether it is indeed carrying sausages!

Bowyers was founded in 1808 and merged with Wiltshire Bacon, based in Chippenham, in 2015. Clearly, 'size matters' here, as the Southern Electric Service BMC van waits for the AEC to pass by Knee's shop on a wet morning. If only we could stop and look in the window – the very latest black and white TV set is proudly on display.

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BODY LANGUAGE

COMMERCIAL VEHICLE BODYWORK

It's always been the case. Since the beginning of motorised transport, in fact, the chassis manufacturers have always wanted the glory and the publicity. Read any period road transport publication and you'll find plenty of information about the chassis – the wheelbase, the features of the cab, the power unit and transmission. But the bodywork on the back of the chassis? At best, a single line describing what general type of body it is – usually pretty obvious from the picture – and for what purpose the lucky customer will be putting it to. Again, the answer to that question is usually easy enough to work out, based on the trade that the customer is engaged in. But details of the bodywork? That's a different matter.

Who built it? What was the bodybuilder's location? From what materials was it constructed? And were there any special modifications made in order to meet customer requirements? Finding a period press release photograph containing that information is, today, in roughly the same category as finding hen's teeth in a hen. Why is that the case? The answer is, tragically, the same throughout the British commercial vehicle industry – 40, 60 or 80, years ago. Indeed it still is the case today, to a certain extent.

The simple fact of life is that British commercial vehicle bodybuilders didn't – and still don't – advertise their products in the trade press to anywhere near the level they should. Instead, they will try to ride on the back of any publicity that the chassis manufacturer might engage in – such as the issuing of press releases, or attending exhibitions and trade shows. That we remember so few names of once well-known bodybuilders kind of proves the point – they just didn't 'get' the need to raise their profile, build a wider customer base, specialise in a certain product line, or indeed build a 'brand' that could be easily recalled by any potential customer. A typical management response was that the quality of the work done would be enough.

Once – and it wasn't so very long ago – every sizeable town had at least one independent vehicle bodybuilder, which would run-up a commercial vehicle body to meet a customer's requirements. Some – like Jennings of Sandbach and Glover Webb and Liversidge of London – had a history stretching back to the days of horse-drawn carts. That very few lasted long in the motor age proves the point.

In order to survive, some companies might have another 'string to it's bow', for example, a commercial vehicle breakdown and recovery service, or perhaps a dealership for one of the more obscure makes of chassis. But generally speaking, there was a clear 'divide' between those engaged in 'mechanical' work on engines and chassis and 'coachbuilders', which tended to work primarily in wood, steel and alloy sheeting.

This is one 'highly-specced' van for any operator of commercial vehicles – let alone for a specialist in the print trade. Was a six wheeler really necessary? We need to remember that boxes of paper are heavy in relation to bulk, so yes, the Sentinel probably was ideally suited to the task. Note the side doors to this purposeful van body.

A TORTURED RELATIONSHIP?

There is another curious angle to this tortured relationship. Ask any chassis supplier – even today – who was primarily responsible for winning the order for a particular new commercial vehicle and the answer will be "It's one of ours". The efforts of the bodybuilder in having to make-up time because of the late delivery of the chassis, the discovery that half the chassis auxiliary items needed relocating (not so easy to do today, thanks to EU Type Approval Rules) and that the wheelbase wasn't

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▲ When is a van body a 'Pantechnicon' and when is it a mere 'Luton'? Looking at period adverts and brochures doesn't necessarily help. Even Group Editor Forbes and Editor Bates disagree! Does a Pantechnicon need to have both a Luton head over the cab and a drop-down section aft of the rear axle? Does it have to have an integrally-constructed cab? Or would a standard factory cab do? Clearly just having a 'Luton head' (an extension originally provided so as to increase capacity to take additional boxes of hats, produced in the town of the same name) is not enough as that only makes it a 'Luton van'. Answers on a postcard please...

This Guy ‘Otter’ Diesel with a fairly basic platform body is featured on page 53.

what was originally ordered, will count for nothing. It was the excellence of the chassis engineering and the great back-up service from the dealer ‘what won it’.

Ask the same question of the bodybuilder, what do you get? “Yes, that’s one of ours,” will be the proud response. The make of the chassis will be completely irrelevant and hardly worth a mention. It was the close personal contact between customer and bodybuilder that won the order. No question.

The truth is somewhere in between of course. But chances are, any hint of close co-operation between chassis supplier and bodybuilder will be missing from any press release. The end result? Several generations of transport industry journalists have had to try to extract details about the bodywork from reluctant chassis manufacturers – not an easy thing to do when press deadlines are fast approaching.

SOMETHING OF A FIRST

All this might help explain why there are so few bodybuilders left in Britain today and, indeed, it certainly helps explain why there are no truly British chassis manufacturers left anymore. ‘Marketing’ has always been treated with suspicion by management in the commercial vehicle industry – which helps to make some of the real life success stories so special. In bodybuilding terms, surely the most spectacular ‘exception’ that makes the rule, is that of Boalloy. At the heart of that success was the brilliant marketing ability of designer and draughtsman, Gerald Broadbent. It was Gerald who claimed to have designed the ‘Kleer Vue’ cab with it’s distinctive oval radiator grill, for ERF. And it was Gerald, who arguably presided over the first really successful creation of a bodybuilding ‘brand’ and distinctive product line in the Boalloy ‘Tautliner’.

True, there were probably more than a dozen bodybuilding companies able to knock-up a bespoke lorry cab that was more attractive than the austere and poorly-equipped examples available from the chassis

Several commercial vehicle manufacturers have put on ‘one make’ shows, to be focussing on bodywork rather than just the chassis. This looks like quite a show, with both FFK/FH and FG chassis being featured, with a wide range of body options including tankers.

▲ When is a Leyland not an Albion? While Octopus and Beaver tractor units featured the 'long-door' version of the LAD cab, the two-axle 'Comet/Super Comet' models stuck with the original 'short-door' design, while all Albion models featured the long door cab. So what is this two-axle long-door cab doing with a 'Leyland'-badged grille? It's another one of those questions that makes the study of commercial vehicles so interesting.

manufacturers – the GRP cabs for AECs by RTS of Hackney are a great example. You only have to read period AEC sales literature to discover that the whole subject of a cab was treated as a minor issue the customer was expected to source locally, or discuss with the dealer. And there was nothing especially 'rocket science' about having a platform body fitted with a roof, front and rear bulkheads and some side curtains – the archives are full of pictures of that very combination. So what made the Boalloy 'Tautliner' so special? The answer was two-fold – the facility to tension the side curtains to safely retain the load, should it move in transit. And secondly? Aside from excellent quality and a keen price – remember, historically, bodybuilders have always had to fight for the budget left-overs from the chassis supplier's 'table' – it had to be down to the strength of the company's marketing. The Boalloy 'Tautliner' was one of the first body designs to be co-promoted by the chassis manufacturers and even offered as a 'drive away' product, direct from the chassis dealership's forecourt.

YOU USED TO SEE THEM EVERYWHERE

Yes, both Bedford and Ford had featured completed dropsiders and panel vans, many years before the 'Tautliner'. But aside from passenger bodywork, or specialist products like the Bedford 'Duple' OB coach or Martin Water 'Dormobile' conversion on a CA van, they rarely gave the actual bodybuilders any credit, did they? In fact, the argument as to which organisation – chassis supplier or bodybuilder – was the 'prime contractor', or the reason why the customer purchased the end-result, sometimes resulted in hostility between the two sides – with the poor customer in the middle! Although outside the scope of this publication (don't worry, there is a plan), take the case of fire-fighting vehicles. There are several examples where the chassis manufacturer wasn't 'allowed' to place a badge or logo on the completed appliance in competition with the badge of the bodybuilder.

SMOKE AND MIRRORS

Carmichael of Worcester is a prime example. Having fallen-out with just about every chassis manufacturer still in the fire-fighting chassis business, Carmichael approached Shelvoke & Drewry with a plan to supply Type-B water tenders and later, turntable ladder chassis. The company wanted the completed product to be known as a 'Carmichael' and was not keen to apply the SD roundel on the radiator grill. These were sent up from Letchworth to be fixed onto the finished vehicle. Even when 'SD' launched the Shelvoke SPV range, using the all-steel 'P Series' cab, the fact that the chassis was built by Shelvoke & Drewry was often only mentioned in passing by the 'top hamper' bodybuilders, as they didn't want customers approaching the chassis supplier for a direct (and possibly cheaper) price. This 'smoke and mirrors' approach was, of course, short-sighted and did little to foster good customer relations on either side.

Hopefully, this publication – looking at the object on the back of the chassis, rather than the specification of the chassis itself – will help correct the balance and give a fuller picture. There are, of course, two factors that make this task more challenging than it should otherwise be. Firstly, as already mentioned, very few period photographs contain details of the body – even on those pictures commissioned and issued by the bodybuilder! And secondly, it is a brutal fact of life that no book packed with pictures of rear views of commercial vehicles – however exclusive – is likely to be a best-seller. So hopefully, you'll forgive mention of the odd chassis make and model here and there as well!

Hope you enjoy the results.

VANS & LIGHT COMMERCIALS FOR THE BUTCHER, THE BAKER AND THE..

There's a rich history of various car chassis – at the time when all cars did actually have a chassis, of course – being used for some other commercial load-carrying purpose, rather than just transporting people. Smaller 7 or 8 horsepower car chassis would provide the next step up from a tradesman's cycle, or motor-cycle and box side-car, for the local butcher, baker or ironmonger. Aside from being able to deliver to customers outside of town, a small van provided an opportunity to promote the business further by some attractive signwriting. Payload? Around 5 cwt – a quarter of a ton.

A regular entrant on the London to Brighton run, KJ 8869, a 1932 Morris, is normally featured in photographs from the front. Here's what the back looks like, with its characteristic oval windows in the rear doors. These were a feature of many vans from the horse-drawn era and the start of motorised transport, right up to World War II. Alas, however good Hoad's 'Korkers' were, they clearly lost the 'sausage wars' to the likes of Wall's and Bowyer's!

While all the railway companies would have operated some motorised vehicles before their amalgamation into the 'Big Four' in 1923, it was only after that historic date that 'motors' started to replace the trusty horse and cart in the transport of goods between railhead and customer. Even though Britain had large commercial companies, such as the Metropolitan-Cammell Carriage & Wagon Company of Birmingham, able to supply their rolling stock needs, the railway companies also had their own coachbuilding shops. Whether the body and cab of this 30 cwt Thornycroft was constructed in-house by the Great Western Railway cannot be confirmed, but it looks likely. Already more than ten years old, it was still in service during World War II – by which time, a cab door with windows would have been more commonplace!

Where the trade involved heavier products – such as enough crates of milk for an entire village – a 10 cwt van chassis would be required and here things got more complicated. Would the best chassis be of normal control layout? In which case, the running gear of a larger 10/12hp car would do the trick. Or would a semi-forward control be better? If the load to be carried was bulky rather than heavy, then a greater cubic capacity than available from the vehicle manufacturer might be needed. Or where something extra smart and classy was needed? Again,

▲ Bodybuilders have long-since been in the business of offering something 'extra' that the chassis supplier might have overlooked. In this case, that 'chassis' manufacturer is Ford and the specialist supplier is Baico – of chassis extension and added axle fame. Here Baico has transformed the humble 1930s Ford 'Y-Type' 5 cwt van into a considerably more spacious mini-parcels van of 115 cubic feet capacity, by virtue of raising and then relocating the driver's controls up alongside the side-valve engine. There can't have been much room inside for drivers with big feet – and the 'suicide' cab doors wouldn't have suited everyone. But it was certainly better than the other option – a motor-bike and goods side-car with no cab!

▲ This 1934 Morris Commercial would have a nominal load capacity of 30 cwt, so adding any extra weight in the construction of the bodywork would be detrimental – which helps explain why the cab roof and sides of this coachbuilt van are finished in fabric. The shape of the cab roof is especially stylish and is formed of wooden slats, over which the fabric is stretched and then 'doped'. It would be much harder to replicate the same shape in metal because of the double curvature.

◀ Sadly, this print of a Fordson van has been damaged, but it's included because (a) we know the name of the organisation of the company that built this rather stylish van body – Barnaby – but also (b) because it enables us to study the rather trendy lettering on the sides. Sadly, just like Barnaby Coachbuilders – a company better known for passenger vehicle bodies – we can't purchase Needlers chocolates today. Was this van painted in dark chocolate brown? Could be, but it's the classy 1930s 'moderne' lettering that is the er, icing on the cake.

▼ It's 1939 and the world is about to be plunged into war. This is an official press release photograph taken by the Commer Publicity Department at Luton. As this van body was a standard production item, we aren't looking for bodybuilder references, but it would have been nice to find out who executed the rather wonderful signwriting. What we do know is that, even as late as 1939, Whitchurch, Salop (although there is also a Whitchurch in Hampshire) was not over-endowed with telephones judging by 'The Model Laundry' being 'Whitchurch 59'!

the specialist services coachbuilder would be required.

Sometimes, it was the bodybuilder that changed to layout of the cab and marketed the end-product – parcel vans are a classic example. Where did a 'light commercial' end and a regular medium duty lorry start? If panel van chassis went up to around 15 cwt payload, then a manufacturer's 'light commercial' range started at a ton and went up to 35 cwt or 2 tons and styles of bodywork followed the same convention.

The bottom line? In terms of bodywork, anything was once possible!

Let's have a look into the archives to see what we can find...✣

➤ Morris produced a factory-built semi-forward control 10 cwt van, with off-set drive-train, to provide extra loadspace within compact overall dimensions. The body was of composite construction, with a ‘doped’ canvas roof to give a double curvature. Here we see a preserved 1936 ‘Series 2’ model at speed on the Trans-Pennine Run back in 1973. ‘At speed’ being relative, of course.

➤ A bit of extra cube wasn’t enough for some customers, so this more ‘sit-up-and-beg parcel van with sliding doors was offered. The extra headroom and easier entry was clearly a big advantage over the cramped driving position of the standard factory offering. Alas, the information slip on the rear of his picture is missing, so we are not informed about who the manufacturer was.

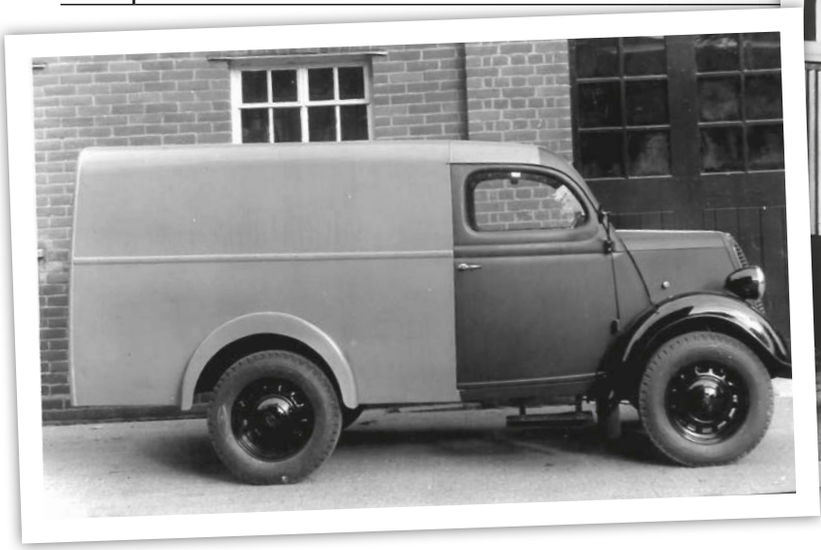
➤ Here’s something that is very much a threatened species – the independent non-chain house furnisher and upholsterer. Blackmore & Sons of Exmouth would have had a classy clientele back in the 1930s, but would have found trading difficult in the early post-war years, as ‘luxuries’ such as furniture were still produced to ‘utility’ regulations. Things must have picked up enough to justify the purchase of this smart Guy ‘Wolf’, with nicely streamlined Luton-headed body and integrally constructed cab, however. Although Blackmore’s also ran a household removals business – and were undertakers! – the Wolf was probably mostly used to deliver new furniture, rather than already used – although it’s trim dimensions would have made it ideal for use in those narrow Devon lanes.

1: Here's another mystery vehicle that could have been so easily explained, had the manufacturer of the chassis – probably Morris-Commercial – mentioned what the body was for and who built it. The location of the photographer, Wright & Logan of Southsea, suggests it might have been taken on behalf of Reading & Co, or perhaps the local chassis distributor, but is the body an ambulance with tinted windows, or is it a 'Black Maria' that has been painted in a different colour? The application of double lines of aluminium beading is interesting – normally it is used to hide the join between two panels – and the use of another colour for the wings suggests 'ambulance'.

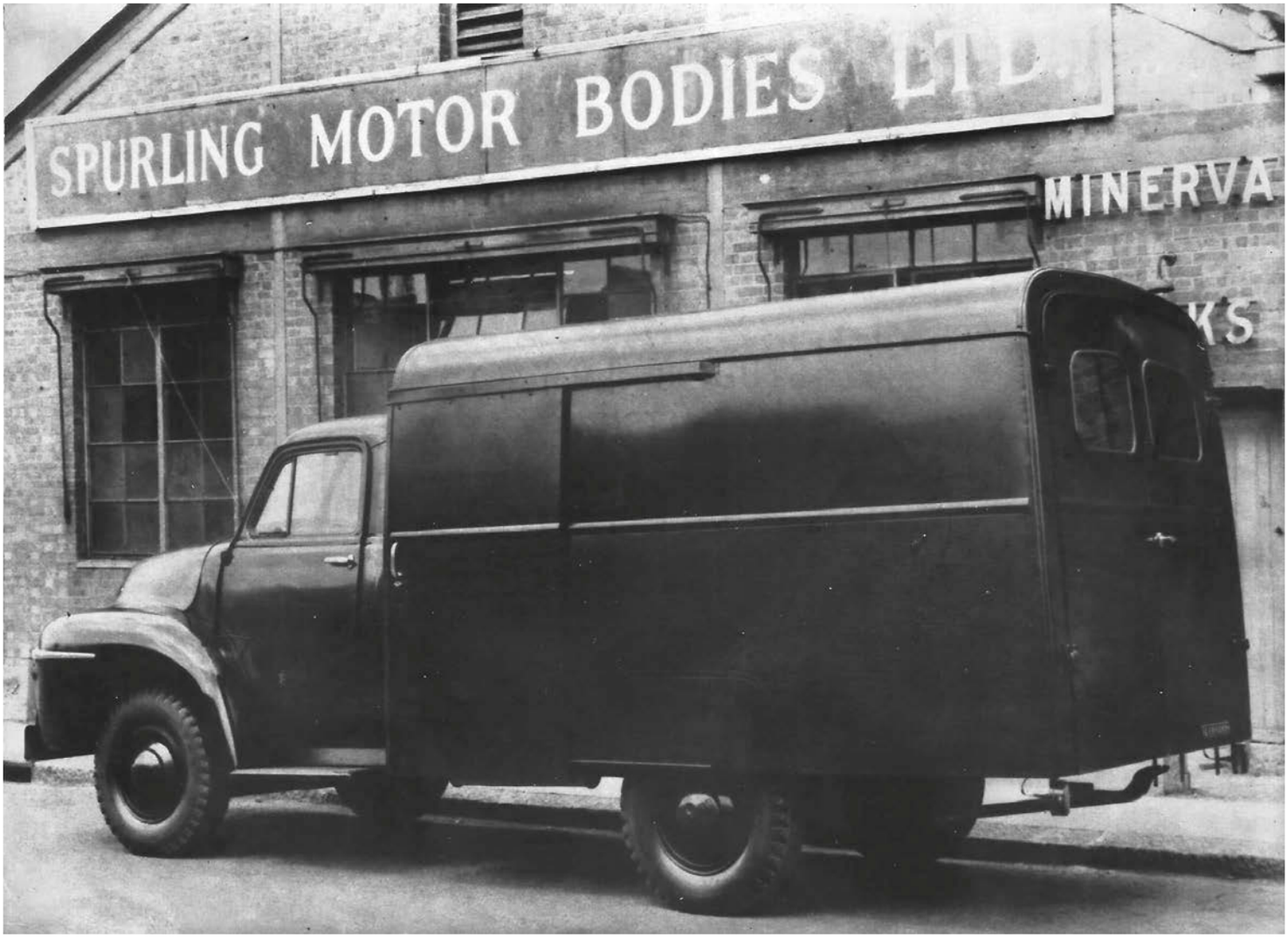
2: This standard Commer 25 cwt van has been photographed on behalf of the Commer Publicity Department by Logan Studios in Birmingham. It shows the rather severe lines of the early postwar Commer, with painted grill and small headlamps, relieved only by a snazzy two-tone paint scheme and bodybuilder-applied roof rack. Walton Brothers had been making confectionery since 1849, but like most such companies, probably distributed its products lose in tins to be sold by retailers on a weight basis, rather than in branded packets, as today.

It's a fair bet that Morris Motors didn't use AEC diesel lorries for transporting heavy loads, but here we discover that AEC did use Morris-Commercial vans to collect spare parts, or maybe for use by a mobile mechanic. Based at the Nottingham depot, this 1945 'LC' normal control van was allowed at the time to run on 'tradeplates'. Note the 'AEC Southall' logo on the side of the van.

When is a van not a van? Judging by this 1949 Bedford K Type, the answer could be when it's a bespoke 'Estate Car', that is to say, a vehicle purchased by a large country estate, or country hotel to ferry guests between the nearest railway station and the big house. Equally then, it could be termed a 'Station Wagon', and with at least three rows of seats and plenty of space in the rear for luggage, this purpose-built Hawson body had far greater capacity than a normal car-derived estate car. True, the slab-sided body was a bit short on 'style', but the late 1940s were austere times...



▲ Ford introduced the side-valve ‘E83W’ 10 cwt panel van and chassis/cab/chassis/scuttle range in 1936 – and carried on producing it until the 400E arrived in 1957. Clearly a lot had changed in the world over those 20 years – except for the E83W, that is! While totally lacking in refinement (6 volt electrics, three-speed gearbox, wheezing side-valve engine, transverse cart springs with rigid axles front and rear), the factory panel van was at least practical and reasonably spacious. So why would a customer direct a bodybuilder to design and build a bespoke panel van body onto a chassis/scuttle unit, with doors? We don’t know the name of the bodybuilder, but the photograph was taken at Andover in Hampshire, which suggests it could have been Locomotors. The body features a more upright rear profile than the standard factory-built van, but the most likely reason for it’s construction was that the local dealer had an over supply of chassis/scuttle (or possible chassis/cabs) and it was quicker to build a van body, than wait for the next batch of factory-built vans to arrive.



▲ We must thank the photographer for going for the obvious shot here, as it confirms that this early 30 cwt Bedford ‘A Type’ does, indeed, have a Spurling body. The team at ‘Minerva Works’ has done the customer proud, with a stylish van body, featuring an external nearside sliding door. Note the rear wheels have been enclosed by a removable ‘spat’ section, but while we don’t know who the actual customer was – or what the intended load was likely to be – it’s interesting to observe that this body is based on a chassis/cab, rather than, as might be expected, a chassis/scuttle in order that cab and body could be ‘air-smoothed’ together.

➤ While the Commer 'Express' factory panel van offered considerably more style than the competition from BMC, Ford and, arguably, Bedford, it still featured no-nonsense engineering. The Rootes Group was very skillful at marketing and in the mid-1950s, when this high roof van was delivered to Bainbridge of Newcastle, offered a comprehensive range of normal control 'Superpoise' models as well. A few 'Express' or 'BC' chassis were, like the later 'Walk-Thru' model, sold as chassis/cab or chassis/scuttle versions for specialist bodywork. Note how this high-roof van features 'short' internally-sliding cab doors, which open into pockets let into the body. Oddly, no cab bulkhead door is visible.

➤ The 30 cwt BMC 'LD' van range was a direct competitor to the Commer 'Express' and was an everyday sight in any 'vintage roadscene' for several decades – long after the range was replaced by the clever, but flawed 'EA', in fact. As with the Commer, there were customers who wanted more 'cube' than the standard factory-built van could provide, although quite why the National Trust needed that extra loadspace is not certain. Here we see 3000 NT (nice registration – from Shropshire, 1963) outside the premises of local BMC dealer, Howards of Andover. In the background, we can see what is a still new Ford Anglia – although the fitment of a single fog lamp suggests it is a used example – and a Farina-styled Wolseley, which had recently replaced the Gerald Palmer-styled 4/44 and later 15/50 in dealer's showrooms.

➤ The LD was also offered as a 2-tonner with twin rear wheels, but the examples purchased by the Royal Mail were unique, in that they featured the shorter wheelbase of the 30 cwt model. Although introduced with a petrol engine, this later example from 1967 is fitted with a BMC diesel engine.

DOWN ELECTRIC AVENUE

ELECTRIC VEHICLE BODYWORK

The bodywork on electrically-powered commercial vehicle chassis always tended to assume a different style from the bodies featured on chassis powered by the internal combustion engine. For a start, there was no radiator to incorporate into the front panel. You might think that would be welcomed by the bodybuilder, but the archives show that, over the years, generations of body designers and craftsmen have found it really difficult to produce a good looking end result, without having a radiator as the starting point. Some left the front panel blank. Others tried to replicate a 'false' grill to provide a focal point. Others went a bit 'OTT' and incorporated wild streamlined flashes that suggested a top speed of rather more than the 18 to 20 mph maximum that was possible!

▲ Fake News? Be warned, there is evidence of some photographer's skullduggery here. Note how the 'shadow' cast by this line-up of new battery electric vans is just that bit too perfect and that there is no space in between each vehicle. Was this shot actually taken outside in some posh London Square? Or have the images of the vans been superimposed onto an otherwise empty road? Closer examination of the print with a magnifying glass suggests the actual ground on which the vehicles were photographed was darker in colour – and wet – whereas the surface of the Square is dry. The number plates however do appear to be 'real' although a jump in roof heights suggests that the vans were photographed three or four at a time and 'stitched' together – in a non-digital age, before 'Photoshop', this was no mean feat. According to the caption, William Whitely, of London WC2, had taken delivery of this fleet of at least 17 new electric vans in April 1939. But here's a mystery – the make is given as 'Sunbeam' on the back of the photograph – a period mistake, or an attempt by the famous maker of trolleybuses to 'down-size'? The venture doesn't seem to have been revived after the war.

More recently, electric vehicles are once again seen as a solution to pollution. But this is not for the first time. From the early 1900s on, posh London stores used to specify electric delivery vans, as an alternative to 'pollution' of a different kind – from horses. Before the outbreak of the World War II, the spread of the suburbs in the 1930s had created a market for electric delivery vehicles for milk, bread and groceries. In the immediate post-war period, a shortage of fuel and hopes for a bright, clean future once again created a demand for new bodywork on electric vehicle chassis.

What will the future bring? Purpose-built 'Milk Float' type electrics are probably a thing of the past as, sadly, most of us now buy our milk from the supermarket. But new lithium-ion battery technology suggests that like Arnie Schwarzenegger, electric vehicles, will be back... ✣

➤ Although a post-war photograph, this shot of a couple of new 30 cwt Morrison 'Electricars' typifies the sales message of both the electric vehicle manufacturers, as well as those of urban artic tractor units like the Karrier Cob, the Scammell Mechanical Horse (and later, the Scarab) and the Jen Tug, amongst others. The message was, in effect, that horse transport, although cheap in terms of capital investment, was labour intensive and because horses were (and still are!) living creatures, they had to be looked after, even when not working. From our perspective on history today, we might think of horse-drawn wagons as being an essentially Victorian and Edwardian mode of transport and, at the very least, something that was out-moded by the late 1920s. A big surprise to discover then, that this photograph taken to 'celebrate' the final retirement of the last horse-drawn cart operated by old-established manufacturer of abrasives and polishes, John Oakey & Sons was taken as late as September, 1955!
Oakey had just taken delivery of 'a fleet' (typically, the press release doesn't tell us how many vehicles that constitutes) of new Electricars, fitted with 300 cubic feet capacity high-roof van bodies, to replace the final horse-drawn vans. The site of 'Wellington Mills' in Westminster Bridge Road (established in 1876) is now the site of an exclusive housing development.

➤ The Royal Mail trialled a number of battery electric vehicles, over several decades, without ever fully signing-up to the concept. On the face of it, quiet, clean, easy-to-drive electric vans were the ideal 'next step' in upgrading the postal delivery service from cycles and pedestrian controlled carts – some of which were electrically-powered. But the limited range and often painfully slow travel speed – especially in hilly districts – made electrics something of a hazard to other road users. And they still took up as much road-space as petrol vans. Taken in 1943, the photograph of this Metrovick postal delivery van has had its number plate 'GCY 752' doctored by an artist for some reason, but the wartime 'black-out' white painted wings seem correct. Note the twin rear doors and lower drop-down tailboard – a typical Royal Mail requirement.

➤ Hello Sunbeam! According to the information on the back of this official press release photograph, the famous London store, Selfridges, ordered "a number of 12-15cwt Sunbeams with appropriate bodywork" in October 1937. We also learn that similar vehicles were delivered to William Whitely Limited.

➤ "Here you are Missus", says the driver of this LEV electric delivery van operated by Curnock's Bread of Edmonton. UMY 281 was clearly photographed on a day when the weather was far from clear, and the driver might have benefitted from the 'luxury' of some cab doors, to keep out the smog that seems to be hanging over an overcast East London. He might have benefitted from a backrest to the rather basic seat as well, but the photo does at least show that there was easy access between the cab area and the interior of the body.

➤ The registration ‘TLD 208’ tells us that this van, badged Smith’s NCB Electric, operated by the famous London store, Selfridges, was delivered in 1957. Sadly, the information on the rear of the press photograph doesn’t give any details of the bodybuilder, but the use of wrap-round windscreens, kerbside viewing windows (returning in popularity once more on modern-day trucks) and neat ‘jacknife’ doors to the cab add up to a rather more attractive appearance than most electrics.

➤ Why not use ‘milk float’-style bodywork for the delivery of other household items – like bread, for example, as here? It’s an interesting question. It could be that electric milk floats, like Wales & Edwards three-wheeler, 718 GVX, didn’t have the range for deliveries without the same intensity as customers for milk – which was essentially every door in the same street. Or it could have been that some products, like vegetables, required a larger load area to take enough for a viable round. Hance’s Bakery of Writtle – in case you were wondering, it’s near Chelmsford in Essex – therefore must have been doing good business in a local area.

➤ Issued by the British Railways ‘Public Relations & Publicity Office’ in March 1954, this press release picture shows a Smith’s NCB high-roof, 1 ton electric delivery van – one of five supplied to BR Eastern Region, for the collection and delivery of parcels from Kings Cross station. We’re told it – and its stablemates – had a range of 37 miles, based on an average of half a load and 12 stops per mile. Maximum speed was 18 mph – a figure parcels van drivers around Kings Cross today can only dream of!

➤ Although brand new and still unregistered, we know this Morrison Electricar was built in 1967, and was part of yet another initiative by the Royal Mail to explore the feasibility of using electric vehicles for mail deliveries. It had happened before – and again since. The cab was in GRP with slam shut ‘plug’ doors that opened inwards and slid in front of the windscreen. The advantage over ‘jack-knife’ doors was that they had larger windows. The disadvantage was that, in summer, the vehicle couldn’t be driven with them open. The body was of more traditional aluminium-clad construction, but provided access for the driver through the cab/body bulkhead.

BOXING CLEVER

BOX VANS

Going back to horse-drawn days, a van body would represent both the most expensive and heavy design of body to have built. While it provided added security and an excellent opportunity for promotion, the added weight was a limiting factor when just one 'vanner' or 'hackney' horse was employed. Interestingly, the same limitations applied to early motor vehicle chassis, but the problems were compounded by the hard ride from solid-tyred lorry chassis – especially in towns that employed stone setts for road surfaces.

This shot of a Sentinel DG six-wheeler with tongue and grooved boarded box van body, operated by transport contractor, A J Cupwell of Park Street, Birmingham, was received at the offices of Modern Transport magazine on July 21st 1930. It was parked outside the manufacturer's head office building in Shrewsbury – presumably ready for delivery to the customer on trade plates.

Aside from added cost and weight over, say, a simpler dropside body with a canvas tilt, what else had to be taken into account? How about the height of over-bridges? Where the doors were located – was a side loading door useful? Should the body feature side valances or skirts?

Right from the start, however, one of the major plus points in specifying a van body was that it created an excellent opportunity to promote the company owning the vehicles, the service it offered, or the goods that it was carrying.

Let's have a look at a few examples...

▲ Here is a rather special body on another three-axle Sentinel steamer chassis. It seems to be a fridge van, but not, as was customary at the time, one loaded with ice. We’re informed that the ‘Silica Gel’ does the job of keeping the load cool instead, but there are two un-answered questions – what function does the plant behind the clearly significant cowling between the cab and body perform in the process? And secondly, did the Sentinel Waggon Works have a commercial stake in the Silica Gel body design? This is clearly a joint prototype demonstration vehicle, but history would conclude the project didn’t result in large numbers of further sales, as no pictures of customer operated vehicles can be found in the archives.

▲ Relax, the owner of this Sentinel steam wagon with a sturdy van bodywork with double barn doors over a heavy duty tailboard was ‘Arthur Davy’ – not a certain ‘Arfer Daly’ of this ‘manor’. We note that Arthur Davy & Sons registered office was Paternoster Row – but in Sheffield, not London. The signwritting on the rear doors informs us that the company was a provisions merchant, but it would be nice to know what constituted ‘Choice Table Delicacies’ wouldn’t it? Whatever they were, they’d need to be well packed, in order to withstand distribution on solid tyres!

▼ The contrast in what was used by the transport contractor and own account operator in the early 1930s couldn’t have been wider. Some still used horses and carts. Others, steam lorries and trailers. But the most accessible and easy to operate were the new breed of fast two-tonners, like this 1932 Bedford. This picture however is worth a closer look – it was, indeed, a UK-spec Bedford, with a British-built roller-shutter sided box van body, built by Super Line Bodies, of London E16. It was, however, destined for export to the historic centre of Oporto in Portugal – the centre for the brewing industry. De F Dicca was an ice-making and cold drinks business.

➤ "Roll up. Roll up..." This Garner 'TW60' six-wheeler was built in 1933, but judging by the signwritting, the key 'product' that the neat box van body with roller shutter side doors was designed to deliver was 'sound'! The Mobile Amplifier Company, of 6 Conduit Street, London W1, was obviously doing well – that's a posh address. But quite how the power for the amplification equipment was provided is something of mystery. Was there a separate electric generator on board? If so, where was it located? Or was the Garner's engine called upon for the task? We do know that the bodywork, as well as the chassis, was 'designed and built' by Garner Motors Limited, according to the signwritting.

➤ New in 1936, this neat little Vulcan box van was based on the forward control 3 ton chassis, and would have given a greater platform length in relation to wheelbase than a comparable payload normal control chassis from Bedford or Ford. It might be assumed that John Eccles of Blackburn was a distributor of 'High Test' oils, rather than a manufacturer, but that is not the case. In fact, the company was credited for formulating the 'Genuine Double Super Purified British High Test' motor oil. Founded in 1930, the company lasted until 1969.

➤ Here's another famous, but equally less common make of chassis – Gilford. The High Wycombe-based manufacturer was perhaps better known for fast passenger coach chassis – or the doomed futuristic Junkers-engined low-floor double-decker – but The Danish Bacon Company obviously saw the promotional value of this striking normal control insulated box van for the distribution of its products. It was later purchased by old vehicle enthusiast Jack Mulley, of 'Mulley's Motorways' fame, still based at Ixworth, Suffolk. Quite a lot of his 'old vehicles' were, of course, at the time still engaged in carrying fare-paying passengers, but the Gilford was signwritten to suggest it had a fleet service van function. It is seen here at the HCVC event in 1958.

Like Vulcan, Dennis was another specialist manufacturer that was highly successful in building light and medium weight chassis for distribution operations, in direct competition with the mass producers, like Ford and Bedford. The van body on this 1930s 2-tonner has a distinct railway company look about it. Operated by London-based parcels carrier, N Francis & Company, BJJ 802 had a very basic front panel and total lack of cab doors or side windows – which must have made even door-to-door multi-drop operations chilly work in winter.

Official Scammell photographer, Gregg Couper of 'The Parade Studio', Watford, has been summoned to attend the road alongside the allotments in Tolpits Lane on a wet morning in 1934, to photograph this rather imposing '13 ton' Scammell Rigid Six trunk parcels van for important, high-profile operator, Fisher Renwick. Following-on from the steam-powered vehicle tradition, when every engine had a name, this 'Manchester to London Steamer' has been named 'Redstart'. Of course it wouldn't have been anywhere near as evocative if the Fisher Renwick had rebranded itself 'Manchester to London Diesels' would it?

◀ Here's another mightily impressive six-wheeled van – this time based on an AEC 'Mammoth' chassis, for another high profile operator of lorries in the pre-war era – Hays Wharf. Visitors to London are still reminded of the original purpose of the River Thames, as a centre for trade and commerce, rather than – as today – a place of entertainment and tourism, as the riverside headquarters of Hays Wharf has survived. Sadly, this AEC with deep-skirted van bodywork for the transport of meat, hasn't. Note the unusual position of the spare wheel, which would have required an additional wheelbox inside the body to accommodate the balloon tyres.

▼ The normal control Austin of the immediate pre-war era earned the title of 'Birmingham Bedford' because, in many respects, it shared the same attributes as its sibling from Luton. Re-introduced after the war – and, of course, produced in large numbers for military applications throughout it – the pre-war models featured different front grille detailing. Still unregistered, this '3 ton long wheelbase box van' was supplied by the Cater Motor Company, the local Austin dealer for Bristol, to the 'famous jam maker' James Robertson & Sons. No prizes for guessing what the load is – it's Golden Shred. "This van," the official Austin Motor Company press release copy informs us, "is an excellent example of the advertising value of well-lettered side panelling." Indeed it is.

▲ The Thornycroft ‘Sturdy’ chassis was a big favourite of the railway companies (or at least the Southern and the GWR), although many featured rather austere body and cab designs, unlike this rather stylish integral van body with internal sliding cab doors and bold streamlining, for The United Yeast Company Limited, of Birmingham. Sadly, by the time it was delivered, it looks like wartime black-out restrictions were in force.

▲ Here’s a wonderful little ‘snapshot’, sent by the late F A Chapman to (presumably) a lorry driver pal or member of his family. On the reverse, he tells us that the Leyland ‘Beaver’ chassis fitted with ‘trunk van’ body, operated by transport contractor ‘PX’ of Rushden, Northants, was “well-designed”, but “not able to withstand the heavy treatment it gets from PX drivers”! Perhaps part of the problem was that it was only fitted with a four cylinder engine, when lorries run by competitor organisations had a bit more ‘grunt’?

➤ This Foden ‘Chinese Six’ chassis from 1937 was fitted with a panelled box van body for a “Daily Service” between London and Swansea – a real slog in pre-motorway and pre-Severn Bridge days. So chances are S J Jeffery probably needed a substantial fleet of lorries to provide that service. Featuring by a modestly-powered Gardner 5LW diesel, it would have been hard work with a ten ton load – or even more so, had a trailer been hitched on behind!

Whether transport contractor Hurst & Payne ever had the location of the company signwritten on the rather substantial sides of this long wheelbase van, isn't clear. But based on a two-axle Foden chassis, it already had black-out headlamp masks and white painted wings, like the Fordson next to it, so maybe the address had been removed for security reasons.

This Albion van was new to the Belfast Co-Operative Society – but when? The rather plain styling suggests it could have been back in the mid-1930s but, in fact, 'GZ 6993' was registered in 1945 – underlining the fact that Albions didn't change in a hurry! Having said that, the revolutionary underfloor-engined 'Claymore' chassis was just around the corner. This Albion reached preservation and is shown taking part in the 1989 Tyne-Tees run. Where is it now?

The Scammell rigid eight-wheeler maintained a traditional radiator long after other manufacturers had come up with cab designs that made it obsolete. But who cares? This Scammell box van survived into preservation to remind us just how imposing a sight they must have seemed on early post-war trunk roads, when being overtaken by something like a Morris or Ford 8. An Austin 7? Chances are, a well-driven Scammell in 'Aberdeen Overdrive' would have sailed past a Chummy with no problem!

▲ The early post-war Morris-Commercial had a rather austere appearance, very much reflecting the era. This forward control ‘FV’ model from 1952 still features the rear-hinged ‘suicide’ cab doors, which several manufacturers of commercial vehicle chassis continued to offer, long after the design went out of fashion in the car world. The reason? It allowed for a cab step ahead of front wheel-arch, as seen on this example. The body has an interesting side profile, with a lower front panel and is fitted with what we can assume is side-loading doors on both sides. It is likely that the body is divided internally into two compartments, one for meat, the other for other provisions, perhaps?

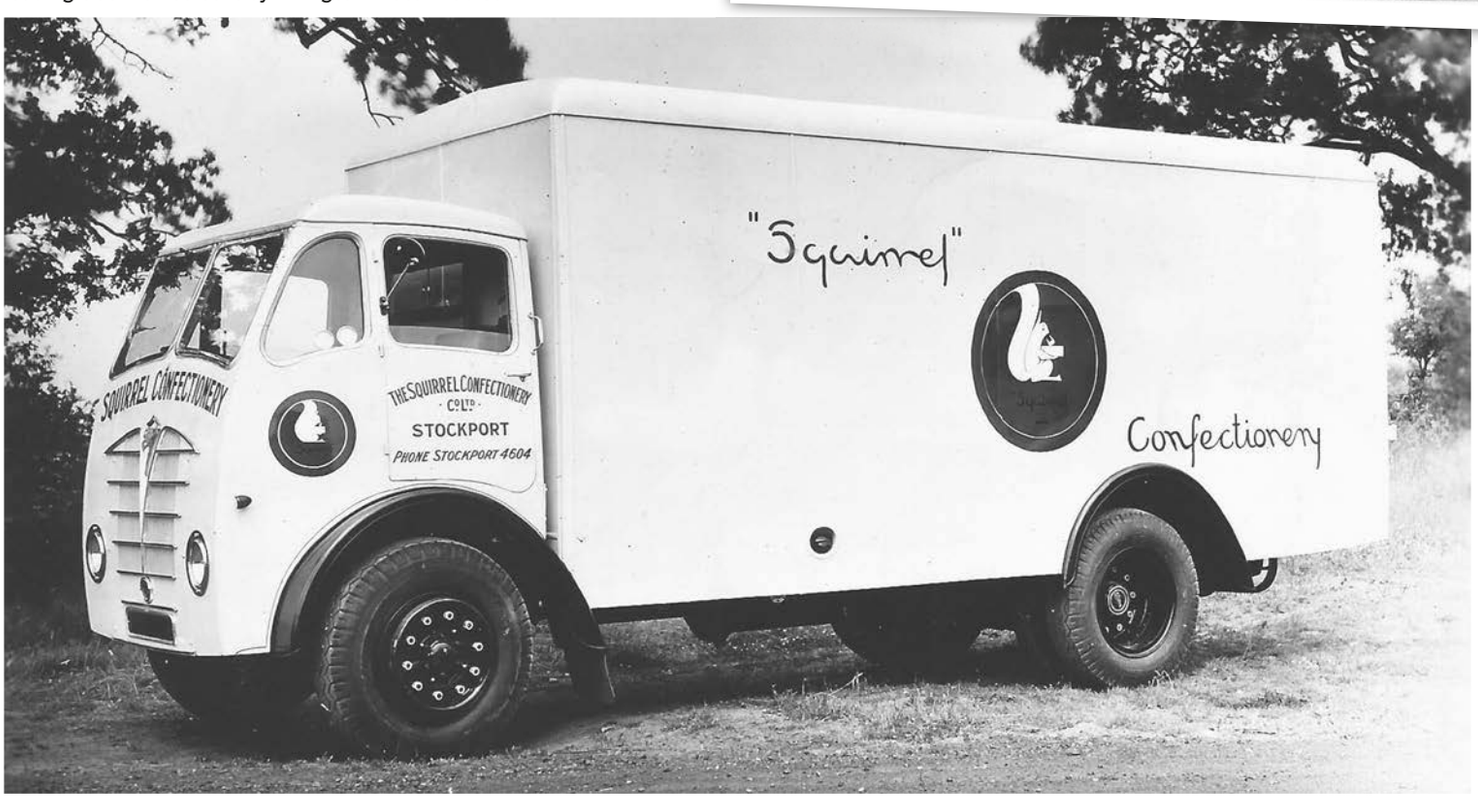
H. Woodley & Co.
HIGH CLASS MEAT PURVEYORS
WE CATER FOR YOUR REQUIREMENTS THROUGHOUT SOUTH WALES
THE LONDON & WELSH T.S. LTD
LONDON-SOUTH WALES
DAILY SERVICE
THE LONDON & WELSH TRANSPORT SERVICE LTD CARDIFF
AUH 540

◀ The only information on the caption slip of this picture of a Foden six-wheeler with insulated van body is that, although photographed in the livery of ‘The London & Welsh Transport Service Limited’, it was originally operated by ‘The Bracegirdle Insulated Meat Company’. It appears that ‘AUH 540’ was operating on contract to H Woodley & Company. The company distributed ‘High Class Meat’ to local butchers in South Wales, but the Foden was most likely to be the trunker, running down the A4 from London markets such as Smithfield, with meat delivered to retailers by smaller vehicles.

▶ This early Leyland ‘Hippo’ six-wheeler operated by ‘Grocer and Provision Merchants’, Kearley & Tonge, is seen passing through Windsor in April, 1953. These large box vans were a regular sight in local High Streets throughout the 1950s – a time when it was easier to find a parking space without restrictions on width or weight – and when there was no such thing as an out-of-town ‘Retail Park’.

➤ It might well have been the case that you'd see Commers everywhere as well – but unfortunately the famed Rootes marketing machine was never given free rein to 'go for it', and really push the Commer and Karrier brands to the same degree as the car brands of Rootes Group were. Truth was, the rapid growth of the Rootes Brothers' empire left little time for a definitive marketing plan. The Vulcan and Tilling Stevens brands were soon forgotten but, although the TS3 diesel gave forward control Commers performance equal to competitors using engines of twice the capacity, the Commer brand was never seen as a 'heavy' – even when the 'Maxiload' was introduced. Unfortunately for Rootes, it's corporate strength lay in simple, normal control chassis like this early post-war 'Superpoise' 3-tonner – a market that was in decline. It is fitted with a van body designed for Crown Bakeries and features a sliding side-loading door. It was built by Arlington Motor Bodies.

➤ "Bedfords – You See Them Everywhere", was the company's sales slogan at the time – reflecting the unusual situation where a British-based manufacturer was allowed to sell widely into other global markets, where the American parent company might have been expected to compete. In the home market, Bedford delivery vans, like this insulated van for the Galashiels United Co-operative Society, continued to play a major role in local distribution, until General Motors pulled out of the UK in the 1980s. Note the small side-loading door on the offside, behind the cab.



➤ Had Corgi Toys ('The Ones with Windows', remember?) started production a few years earlier, this Foden could have been the precursor to the famous KV-cabbed ERF box van in 'Moorhouses Jam' livery. There is a parallel here, in that neither Moorhouses Jam or 'Squirrel Confectionery' ended up as nationally-recognised brands, in the same context as 'Hartley's'. But the most interesting aspect of this photograph is that we do have a full description of the specification on the caption slip. The cab, we're told is "a 'fully enclosed' (meaning it has cab doors and windows basically!) coachbuilt 'Streamlined' driver's cab with chrome-plated windscreens, a metal roof and exterior panels in alloy sheeting. The van body is 17 feet 6 inches long, by 7 ft 6 ins wide, with 6 ft 6 ins headroom. It is mounted (as we've already spotted) on a 7½ ton capacity Foden chassis with 'Oil Engine'. The body has two full length rear doors, secured by 'shoot bolt and padlock'. The van framework is best quality seasoned hardwood, with exterior panels in alloy sheeting and internal laths to help protect the load. The body underframe is protected by a covering of 'thick texture waterproof material'".

➤ Here's another classic van on a 'quality' chassis. This 1952 ERF features a van body built integrally with the cab. Chances are, the low streamlined Luton head was more for show than any practical purpose, but we note that the combination of the body and selection of a heavy duty chassis has tipped the unladen weight over 3½ tons, so it remains restricted to a maximum legal speed of 20 mph. Gross weight is 9 tons. 'Salt' was of course one of the key products of Cheshire, so it was only right that Cerebos selected local lads ERF as the chassis supplier. Note that the Royal Warrant is displayed on the body sides. Just think – the Queen could have used salt delivered by YMH 832 on her chips!

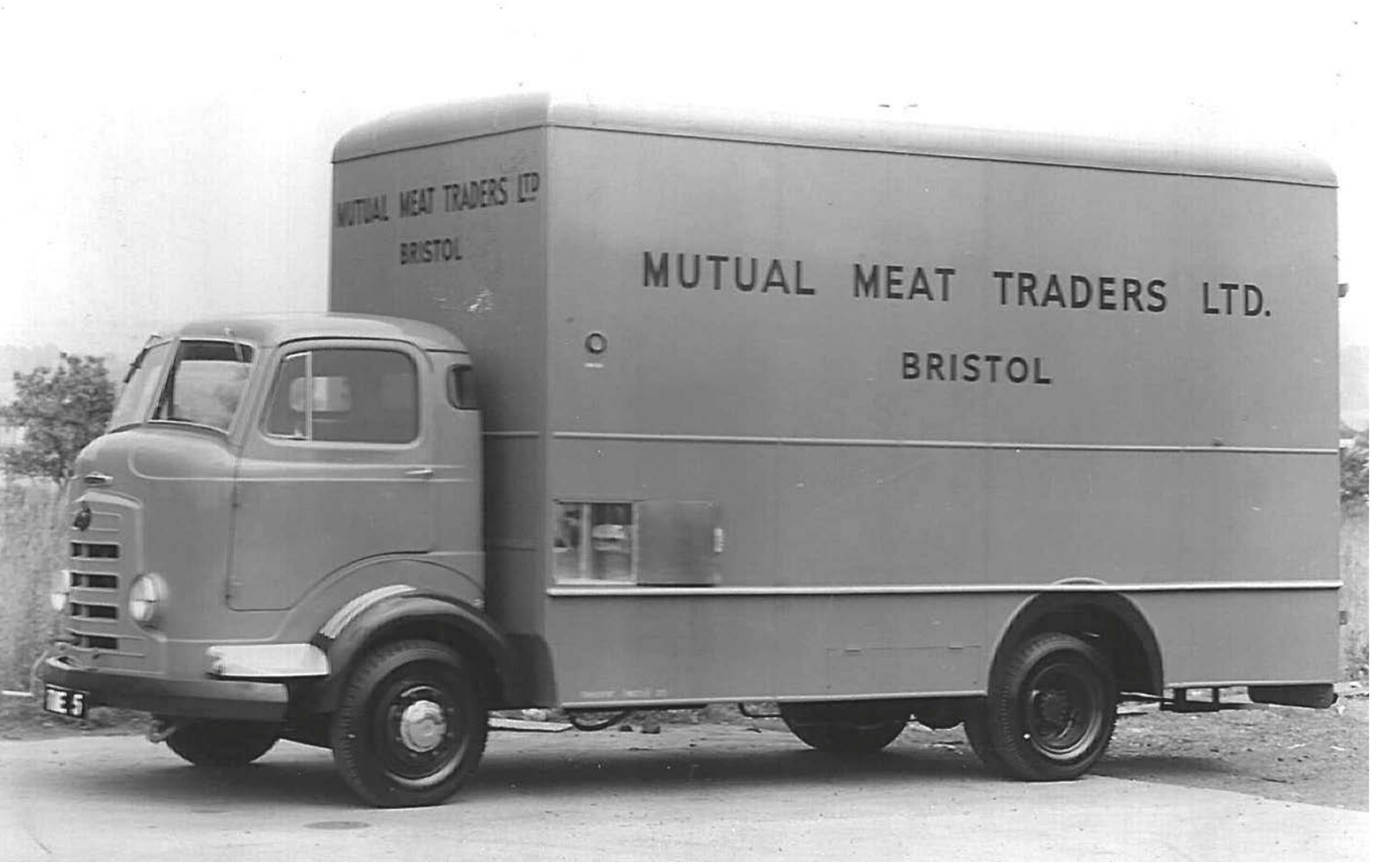
➤ Chinese Six box vans have a certain style about them and this AEC Monarch III (it's not a 'Mustang' according to the caption details) operated by 'Cow & Gate' (or more likely Wincanton Transport on contract) has a bit more style than most. The body features polished aluminium beading at cant-rail level and some rather cheeky signwriting that suggests 'Royal Babies' – which, we can assume refers to Prince Charles and Princess Ann – got to be the way they are today as a result of chomping away at Cow & Gate products. But it's the cab that holds the most interest. AEC was known for conservative attitudes towards cab design, so this one with fledgling 'wrap-round' windscreens is a sort of halfway house between a conventional cab, as built for AEC chassis by the likes of Tillotsons, and the thinking behind the 'KV' cab introduced by ERF.

➤ This photograph has been seen before, but the copy in the files is an original print. It shows a Dodge 'Parrot Nose' semi-normal control chassis fitted with a neat van body for BRS Birmingham Parcels Group. What isn't explained is why the rear of the body is so truncated. In fact it's got such a short rear overhang, the spare wheel has been mounted within the wheelbase, which then required a removable flap to get it off the carrier. The long wheelbase would certainly make it hard for the driver to negotiate the tight corners around Birmingham's inner city business quarters. One further mystery – the photograph was taken in London, so was this vehicle about to take part in some special procession or display like the Lord Mayor's Show? There has to be a reason why the driver is (a) in the shot and (b) has been issued with a smart new white overall!

➤ Here's another prototype that could have so easily achieved lasting fame by being replicated as a diecast model. But by which manufacturer? Lesney, in the Matchbox 1-75 series, produced a four-axle ERF with 'Kleer Vue' cab as a dropsider in 'Ever Ready' colours. Likewise, Spot-On also produced a four-axle ERF with KV cab. Corgi Toys produced the two-axle ERF KV with a van body 'Moorhouses Jam', so we're left to speculate which could have replicated this imposing ERF in 'Rivita-for-Go' livery. A range of big Spot-On ERF two-axle liveried vans would have been great. Scandinavian crispbreads were one of the first food products to suggest a healthy lifestyle - a poor substitute, some would say, for a total lack of flavour!

▲ Vans like this little Fordson 4D 'Costcutter' would have been an everyday sight in just about any High Street up and down the land in the 1950s and well into the 1960s. The use of normal control, or as here, a 'semi-normal control' layout (the engine did impose into the cab a bit, hence 'semi'), was still seen as the best solution for multi-drop and urban delivery operations. Here we see THY 331, registered and ready for delivery to 'Vitality Bread' in 1954 – note the name unfortunately shortened to 'Vity', when the nearside sliding door was opened! The van body is of two compartment construction, the front section probably used for empty trays picked up from retail bakers.

Bowyers, we have already established, used AEC box vans to distribute pork pies, sausages and other meat products, but here we see 358 MVX, one of three Morris 5-tonners in the fleet in 1959. The insulated van bodywork features a side-loading – or more to the point, side 'unloading' – door, just ahead of the drive axle and is fitted with 'Flettner' roof ventilators – a British-made product that is still in production today!



The Commer- Karrier 'Gamecock' was the intermediate chassis between the little 'Bantam' and the larger Commer chassis, featuring the same basic cab design. We can see here that this Gamecock has been supplied with smaller wheel and tyre equipment to get the body floor height down. This has resulted in a significant 'filler' panel between the normal cab wheel-arch shape and the smaller wings fitted here. The rather tall fridge van body features a easy walk-in rear step, to help the driver deliver what might well have been heavy sides of beef that were top hung from rails inside the body.

Here's a boxvan that was modelled in diecast ! This Guy Warrior was photographed by the official Guy Motors photographer and the image used in a Guy brochure. The location next to an old-fashioned trawler suggests the customer was involved in the distribution of fish – or more likely frozen fish, but lack of signwriting doesn't help us here – but the colours suggest it wasn't Birds Eye. The van body is close to that modelled by Dinky Toys – surely a Guy van in the livery of a supplier of fish fingers would have been a huge sales success at the toy shops?

The Willenhall cab design gave the combined BMC range a neat, unassuming appearance, which would have been at home in any High Street. Sadly, we don't know what products this neat box van with side roller-shutter door was used to deliver, as it has yet to be signwritten or registered.

▲ Before the BMC normal control models were produced with a common cab design differing only in the grille, this Austin 'Loadstar' would have arguably had it over the Morris design in terms of style and modernity. This 1954 example has been fitted with a smart, insulated van body for the London Central Meat company. It would have been a regular around Smithfield Market.

➤ "Beer is Best" says the lettering on the grill of this Morris van with integral cab and side roller-shutter doors – unusually only opening down to the height of a dropside body. With what we know today about the effects of excessive drinking, perhaps the question should be: "best for what?" The Morris was part of the Ansell's Brewery fleet and was most likely used to delivery 'high value' loads such as wines and sprits – thus rather undermining the message on the front grille! The cab canopy must have only been there for visual effect – there is no space for any overhead storage.

1956 AUSTIN 4 TON VAN, (4 CYL. DIESEL) SEEN AT WESTMINSTER (WITH VAN-BOY) ON LONDON PARCEL DELIVERY/COLLECTION WORK, WHEN NEARLY NEW, IN JUNE 1956. EVEN WITH A LIGHT BODY, THE BMC 2.4 HP ENGINE (GOVERNED TO 35 MPH) WAS A LEMON
BRITISH ROAD SERVICES
NORTHANTS PARCELS
OJF 618

➤ It's not often that we get a first-hand account of what life was like with a particular make or model of lorry – or an insight to what the driver's job was like. 'Time' is a great healer – but it also brings with it a temptation to view the past through 'Rose Tinted' glasses. Not so with the 'van boy' pictured here, a Mr R G Peters of Far Cotton, Northampton. The picture was taken in 1956, when this normal control 4 ton Austin with van body operated by BRS Parcels, was still new. Although based in Northampton, it's seen here at work in Westminster, Central London and the caption suggests that the BMC diesel engine was something of a gutless wonder. "Even with a light van body fitted," Mr Peters informs us. His verdict? "Even governed to 35mph, it was a lemon," he adds.

▲ ‘Locomotors’, with works at Andover and offices at 154 Grosvenor Road, London SW1, was one of Britain’s principal commercial vehicle bodybuilders in the 1950s and ‘60s. This alloy-panelled refrigerated van was ‘completely insulated with expanded polystyrene’ and designed to meet the requirements of Neilsons Ice Cream and Frozen Foods Limited. it is based on a Commer ‘Superpoise’ chassis and was exhibited at the 1958 Commercial Motor Show. Was ‘Canada’ especially renowned for the production of Ice Cream?

◀ Side loading doors don’t tend to feature on van bodies today – although the advent of curtain siders have largely taken over in that respect. Here we see a Bedford TA van with two unusually large hinged side loading doors for meat wholesaler Edgar Smith & Sons of Liverpool. While the address, ‘25, Stanley Abattoir’ is truthful and accurate, it leaves no doubt in the mind of vegetarians, that this is no place for a pleasant walk!

▶ Here’s another almost identical Locomotors van body on a Commer ‘Superpoise’ chassis for ‘Eskimo Frozen Foods’ – a brand that seems to have been part of Neilsons. The refrigerated body, however, appears to be built onto a slightly shorter chassis, with a longer rear overhang.

➤ What a load of Toffee! This impressive box van body on a 1956 Atkinson eight-wheel chassis illustrates nicely the fact that in the foodstuffs and confectionary business, 'image' is a vital part of the equation. Notice how the whole van body has a curved and streamlined shape with both 'tumblehome' to the sides and a curved roof profile front to rear. This would have made it doubly difficult to manufacture, but the end result was clearly worth all the effort. The body has a 15 ton payload – that is indeed a lot of Toffee!

➤ Modestly-powered Albion chassis continued to find customers looking for a 'quality' chassis for middleweight operations, such as urban deliveries, and it took several years of British Leyland mis-management and lack of investment, before they were finally all driven away. Here we are in happier times and transport contractor S W Wreford & Sons of Northampton – still in business today – has just taken delivery of a smart new Albion 'Clydesdale'-based box van, to assist in the distribution of Heinz foodstuffs – all 57 varieties of 'em! The date of the picture is 1959 and we see that, although pallets were in use at this time, Heinz products were still packed in cardboard boxes.

➤ Designing a successful integral box van is a harder proposition than it might sound – primarily because the cab is the most expensive part to design and manufacture. So how should history judge the BRS 'Noddy' van? Designed for 'parcels and smalls' collections and deliveries, it was said at the time to have been designed by a committee that included union representation, as well as input from BRS Parcels fleet managers and service fitter staff. The deep windscreens were billed as a major safety feature, but were kept flat for ease of replacement. The sliding cab doors gave a low step height and the canopy above the cab enabled the driver to stand to walk across the flat cab floor and put on wet weather clothing if need be. The wide rubbing strip was clearly a useful feature to save everyday 'dents and dings' damage, but the nearside door wasn't designed for kerbside loading – and no other side doors were fitted, as might have been expected. The stubby bonnet was made of GRP and underneath was a modified normal-control BMC chassis of first 3, later 4 tons capacity.

➤ What do you need to go with sausages? ‘Chips’, obviously – but some eggs would be good, too. Here we see an unusual choice of chassis for the job of egg distribution – a 1961 LAD-cabbed Dodge. The long, low-height van body, built by Barnaby of Hull, has a side loading door and is refrigerated – although this was hardly an issue when it was freezing on the outside as well!

➤ The population of Britain must have been eating a lot of sausages! Clearly, a fleet of AEC and BMC vans was not enough to do the job, as Bowyers also purchased this Albion ‘Clydesdale box van in 1961. The ‘low door’ version of the LAD cab would have made the driver’s job much easier on multi-drop work.

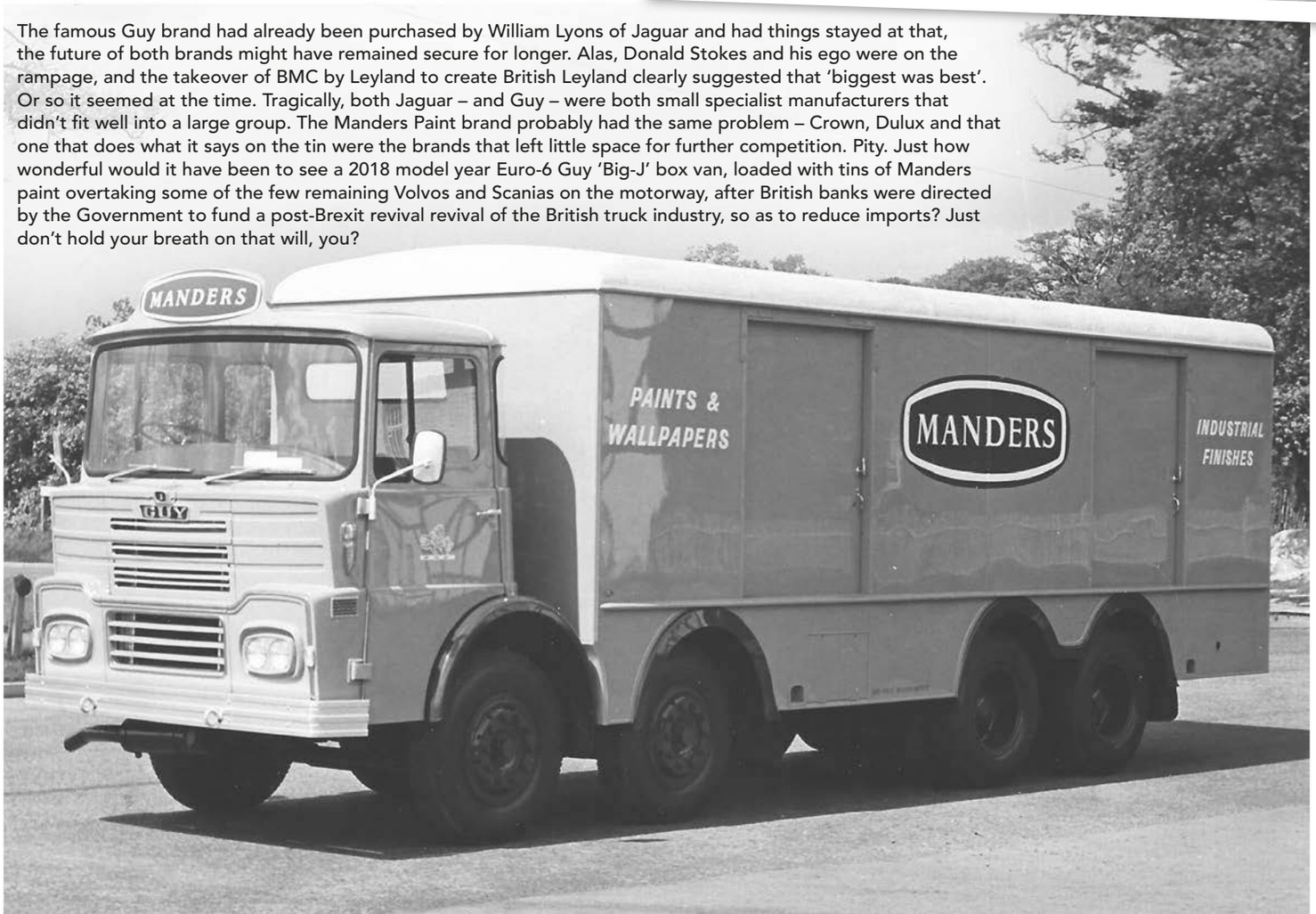
➤ Hang on, we’re cooking-up something of a fry-up feast here. We have sausages. We have eggs. Now we have bacon, courtesy of H Chr Herman ltd of Hull, distributors of Danish bacon – in the 1960s, all without the need to establish ‘Political Union’ or a ‘European Superstate’, note. The choice of chassis is interesting – the new (in 1963) Ford Thames Trader ‘NC’. The Barnaby body is refrigerated.

➤ Here’s another Locomotors body, on a stylish new Morris Commercial chassis, with panoramic one-piece wraparound windscreen. New in 1957, for FMC – ‘The Fatstock Marketing Commission’, another of those umbrella organisations like the ‘Milk Marketing Board’ that sought to regulate and control prices and supplies, to protect both consumer and supplier. What a pity Austin and Morris cars of the period adopted heavy box-like styling by Pininfarina – the ‘57 Chevy looks of these lorry cabs could have worked well on BMC cars.

➤ Here's a famous name from the past. Once, every High Street – in even quite small market towns – had it's own International Stores. The name suggested exotic foreign spices, cheeses and other delights, although to most shoppers, 'exotic' probably only stretched to a packet of Garibaldi biscuits. International Stores did move to supermarket methods of retail, but too late – most food stores still had counters with white-coated staff to serve customers and sold biscuits by the ounce from large metal tins. It was an 'old fashioned' way of life that was about to change forever, yet this green and cream LAD-cabbed Leyland 'Super Comet' box van, with roller shutter doors still seems 'modern' to us today.

➤ The printing trade has been decimated by the advance of new technology – and a willingness to ship business off to Hong Kong and China, to save a bit of cash, at the expense of British print workers jobs. Harking back to more stable times, when a job in print was seen as a profession for life, this smart Guy 'Big J' was in itself on the cusp of massive change in the automotive industry. New in 1968, this two-axle chassis had a sliding side door van body built to meet the requirements of Clarke & Sherwill Printers of Northampton. The strapline 'Letterpress and Gravure Printers' underlines that the company had yet to embrace the lithographic process – a change that if not undertaken very quickly, would make it impossible to compete, as graphic designers embraced the new freedoms the litho process allowed.

The famous Guy brand had already been purchased by William Lyons of Jaguar and had things stayed at that, the future of both brands might have remained secure for longer. Alas, Donald Stokes and his ego were on the rampage, and the takeover of BMC by Leyland to create British Leyland clearly suggested that 'biggest was best'. Or so it seemed at the time. Tragically, both Jaguar – and Guy – were both small specialist manufacturers that didn't fit well into a large group. The Manders Paint brand probably had the same problem – Crown, Dulux and that one that does what it says on the tin were the brands that left little space for further competition. Pity. Just how wonderful would it have been to see a 2018 model year Euro-6 Guy 'Big-J' box van, loaded with tins of Manders paint overtaking some of the few remaining Volvos and Scanias on the motorway, after British banks were directed by the Government to fund a post-Brexit revival revival of the British truck industry, so as to reduce imports? Just don't hold your breath on that will, you?



Time for some rear views? This is an official press release photograph taken by Arthur Winter of Preston, Lancs, for Homalloy. The sad demise of the unique BMC ‘Thrupenny Bit’ wagon opened the market up to other chassis manufacturers such as Ford, as here. Previously, the BMC rearward-opening cab door enabled the driver to enter and exit the cab, without impeding traffic flow and – so the story goes – it enabled bakers, dairies and other customers in distribution to park more lorries in any given garage space. All that seems to have gone out of the window, when a new generation of tilt-cab lorries like the Ford D-Series arrived. Bedford was still hanging on to the non-tilting TK cab – at least until the TL came out several years later. The Commer ‘Commando’ also did well, but it was the D-Series that gave Ford a clear market lead. Here we see a neat van body for distributing ‘Sunshine Bread’. There’s a side-loading compartment, but there’s also a big cloud on the horizon in 1970 for local, regional bakeries – the big supermarkets are poised to take over the world.

This rear view underlines that there was another revolution on the way – the march of technology in the workplace. Rank Xerox photocopiers would bring new levels of quality and speed to an environment that was still largely dependent on carbon paper. This Ford D-Series chassis features a double-deck van body with tail lift and what looks like recessed tracks, to enable stillages to be wheeled onto the tail lift and held securely while loaded.

Talking of change, ‘Silvertown’ on the the River Thames was once part of a huge industrial complex, which covered most of the north bank from Tower Bridge east to Dagenham and beyond. Silvertown was in the very heart of what has since become ‘Docklands’, one of the largest areas of urban wasteland in Greater London today. The Tate & Lyle refinery is still there, although this fleet of Bedfords has long gone. Back in 1974, Tate & Lyle was busy comparing two different transport distribution options – the two-axle Bedford KG at 12.55 tonnes gross and the distinctive twin steer 6x2 model rated at 14.7 tonnes.

Here's rear view of the bodywork fitted to the two-axle Bedfords. Fleet number 1447 was registered in 1973 and features a three-section sliding door system on both sides – and a broad roller shutter door on the rear. The blank section of body is necessary to accommodate the roller mechanism and, of course, provide clearance between the two when open. Interestingly, this press release photograph was taken by the Tate & Lyle publicity department, not by Bedford or the bodybuilder.

Quite what those formulating British licensing laws have had against the 'wagon and drag' combination isn't clear. But the truth is, compared with other countries, the rigid chassis pulling a draw-bar trailer has always been unfairly treated, in comparison with the jack-knifing prone, useless off-highway, articulated unit. But every now and then, either transport operators – or trailer manufacturers – have sought to redress the balance. Which is what we have here. We see a nicely-matched 4x2 AEC 'Ergo' with full draw-bar trailer. Both feature York 'Freightmaster' van bodywork and a closer look confirms that the draw-bar trailer is, in effect, a semi-trailer on a dolly axle – something the authorities would subsequently determine amounted to two trailers. Which was therefore only legal for farmers and fairground operators. See the problem? We have idiots in charge of our lives.

Twin steer 6x2 chassis, utilising smaller diameter wheel and tyre equipment suited to multi-drop delivery work, enabled the Chinese Six to enjoy a brief, but interesting, revival from the late 1960s. Here we see a British Leyland urban distribution solution featuring a third-axle conversion by Primrose. The roller shutter door bodywork is designed to help the unloading of Minster Mineral Waters – a local brand that clearly was in direct competition with the likes of Schweppes. What is not clear is why this Leyland 'Redline' is badge-less? Was the transport manager at Minster Minerals an old school BMC fan, who objected to the Leyland logo being stuck on anything that moved?

➤ We’re back with Ford. Here’s a front three quarter shot of a Ford D Series taken in 1970. It formed part of a press pack issued by the Ford Motor Company Press Office and informs us that this D0607 is fitted with a lightweight aluminium box body by Cravens Homalloy featuring nylon racking. Suitable for non-HGV drivers, it was part of a large fleet delivered to the British Bakers Group, which included Beatties Bakeries of Glasgow.

42230-23 Bedford TK 1630, distinguished by twin front bumper, is designed for operation at 16 tons and is powered by the 151 bhp Bedford '500' diesel engine.
Vauxhall Motors Ltd. Issued September, 1976. Copyright free.

➤ This photograph could well have been taken by Peter Davies, when he wasn’t out in the Vauxhall-Bedford yard, photographing old AECs, Scammells and other ageing British wagons, delivering steel and other components to make into new Vauxhalls. It’s a TK1630 and was... “designed to be operated at the 16 tonne gross weight limit and distinguished by the twin front bumper”, the press release caption (probably also penned by Peter) tells us. The power unit is the 151 hp Bedford ‘500’ diesel. The roller shutter door van body is for Whitworth’s ‘Quality Foods’ which included dried fruit and other baking essentials. Note this chassis is not referred to as a ‘KM” – even though it shared the same double front bumper. This also most likely involved Peter Davies. How? As a Maudslay fan, he would have seen the distinctive double front bumpers fitted to BRS Parcels Maudslay box vans, similar to the ex-works Maudslay he had recently rescued. That feature gave Bedfords more ‘street cred’.

➤ The times they are a changing. You just don’t see vans with cigarette branding down the sides anymore – there’s probably a law against it. But back in the day, ‘JPS’, ‘Marlborough Country’ and, as here, ‘Kensitas’ Virginia ciggys would have been promoted by large signwriting. This van-bodied Bedford ‘TK 860’ is powered by a ‘330 cubic’ inch diesel (After all, Bedford was owned by Americans who insisted on ‘cubes’ rather than Yew-ro-Pean ‘cc’s) and could be operated at 8.6 tonnes, or 7.5 tonnes in non-HGV guise.

42230-17 Bedford TK 860, powered by 330 cu.in. diesel engine, is available for operation at 8, 6 tonn
(8, 5 tons) or (in the 'no-HGV-licence' class) at 7, 49 tonnes (7, 38 tons).
Vauxhall Motors Ltd. Issued September, 1976. Copyright fre

WHERE CUBIC CAPACITY RULES

PANTECHNICON VANS

What is it about large capacity vans? Is it a case of 'size' being everything? Or perhaps the 'romance' of having the capacity to swallow the contents of an entire house and transport them halfway around the country, enabling people to start a new life somewhere, hopefully brighter and better?

▲ "Leylands latest", exhorts the caption slip on the reverse of this February 1933 photograph. "The Llama Low Loader", we're told, "is an interesting demonstration model which is now touring the country. Designed on passenger vehicle lines (which means it has a dropped chassis), the Llama lends itself to the mounting of bodies which, in addition to providing a low loading height, are very attractive in appearance." Yep, that covers it pretty well. There was indeed a fashion in the 1930s for using passenger vehicle chassis for long, low bodies – in many cases reverting back to normal control to give a streamlined look. That we don't find many pictures of Leyland 'Llamas' in the archives suggests that, sadly, the demo tour was not big success despite the attractive van body with wide integral cab fitted to this demo vehicle. Was the preserved example the only one?

Not all big vans are used on 'household removals', of course. Some were operated by large furnishing stores, at a time when just about every small town had an independent family-owned business supplying furniture, bedding and other household needs. Some also undertook removals, in competition with large national companies, such as Pickfords – and until the 1960s, the former Big Four railway companies and then British Railways. Commercial business and agricultural removals were another less often publicised business, but large vans were also used by the furniture manufacturers to deliver their products from factory to retailers.

But it wasn't just furniture - several transport operators used large capacity vans with Luton heads and side skirts to carry a range of other 'parcels and smalls'. Let's have a look at some...

▲ Here's another period photograph from the manufacturer's publicity department, in this case from Dennis of Guildford. Taken in 1932 and published in 'Modern Transport' magazine in July, it would be nice to learn more about the bodywork, especially as the furniture van pantechnicon body features an odd combination of drop-down rear well, but no Luton head above the cab. Fitted with both cab roof and body-mounted roofrack, the van body is also unusual in that it provides accommodation for up to four loaders in the compartment behind the cab. One thing we do learn: "the striping is canary yellow and 'dark orange' with yellow/orange signwriting". The customer was famous London store, Barkers of Kensington.

It seems odd that such as imposing vehicle as this (also) 1932 Dennis is rated as a 3.5 tonner. It looks like it could easily take a load of at least five. There is no indication that 'Platts Direct Service Transport' specialised in furniture transport and there is no drop-well at the rear of the chassis, so we can assume the Luton head was there to add cubic capacity for general parcels and smalls traffic. The body is quoted as being built by Clements Butler & Company. London to Glasgow is still a tough trip today, where time schedules can go out the window, thanks to traffic hold-ups. But in winter in the mid-1930s? It would be really tough and a round trip could take several days and nights.

This 1935 Leyland 'Cub' (SKZ3) features the longest wheelbase available on this model and was one of three supplied to Messrs R Dawes of Walsall, working under contract to John Hawley & Co, producer of 'Goodall Brand' products. What products exactly? Sadly, the signwriting – although good in most respects – doesn't tell us that vital fact! What we can deduce is that, whatever the product range was, it wasn't very heavy as the Cub was only rated as a 4-tonner. The van body was built by David Smith & Co of West Bromwich.

▲ This 1936 Morris Commercial is fitted with a "1000 cubic feet pantechnicon body", for the collection and transport of furniture between, we assume, the customer's house and the nearest railway goods yard. Which means there had to be another LMS furniture van at the other end of the trip to collect it from the goods yard. House removals by rail, were clearly suited to longer distances, but it helps underline how the 'Big Four' railway companies were involved in many different types of operation not even possible today.

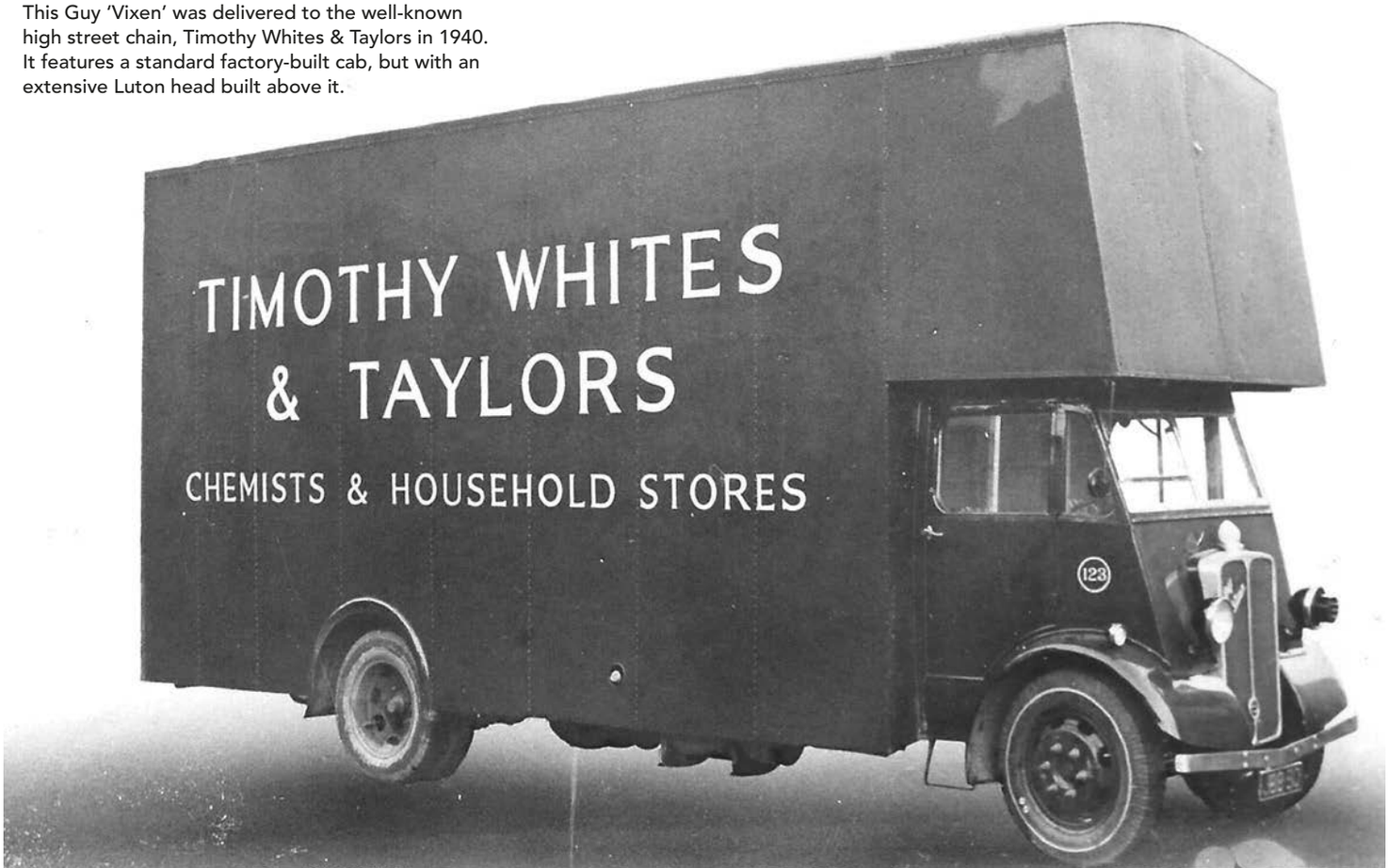
▼ Here's an indication that Guy had a long held reputation for producing chassis ideally suited to furniture removals and transport. Could it be that the Guys delivered before the start of World War II, like GL 5860, seen here ready for delivery to Podger & Davis of Weston-Super-Mare, performed so well in difficult conditions, that when peace was declared, customers went back to Fallings Park for more of the same? This Guy 'Otter' was only rated at 4 tons capacity, but then 'furnishings' are not especially heavy are they?

▼ It's a great pity that the construction of the highly innovative Jensen commercial vehicle chassis co-incided with the outbreak of World War II. The same basic concept was put into production in the late 1940s – enhanced by the fitting of the newly available Perkins P6 diesel engine – but much of the 1930s 'streamlined' look had gone. Arguably it was no longer apt in the austere post-war era of Utility furniture and continuation of rationing? This 1939 photograph shows what is described as "the only lightweight pantechnicon produced" – meaning we can assume, that even with this impressively large body, the unladen weight was still under 3 tons. A remarkable achievement. Here AEA 959 has already been fitted with black-out headlamp mask, but the newly painted bodywork for Kingfisher Limited, also based in Jensen's home town of West Bromwich, has yet to have those stylishly-curved wings disfigured by white paint. It is a certain bet that having started out as a producers of 'racy' car bodywork, the Jensen brothers themselves had a hand in the design of this van.

▼ This is a wartime pattern ‘Vix-Ant’ built for civilian ‘essential user permit holders’ during 1943. Featuring the very basic flat-panelled cab also used on WD models, this longer wheelbase 4x2 chassis does at least lend itself to a more suitable body design. Supplied to Guest, Wood & Ling of Bath, Bristol and London, it might well have replaced a existing van that had been lost in the Blitz as both London and Bristol were both heavily bombed by the Luftwaffe.

▲ Off-hand, it’s hard to think of a commercial vehicle chassis less suited as the basis of a pantechnicon van body than this wartime Guy ‘Vix-Ant’. Officially rated at a modest 15 cwt capacity, it was built to tow guns, limbers and other military trailers over rough terrain, without getting bogged down, so the combination of stiff suspension and short wheelbase was far from ideal when it came to carrying something as delicate as new furniture. But it does illustrate just how serious the shortage of new vehicles must have been after the war. Disposed of by the ‘Ministry of Supply’ in 1946, it was converted into a furniture van by Horley Garage of Nottingham and was probably used to deliver new ‘Utility’ furniture.

This Guy ‘Vixen’ was delivered to the well-known high street chain, Timothy Whites & Taylors in 1940. It features a standard factory-built cab, but with an extensive Luton head built above it.



▲ This photograph was issued by the Commer Publicity Department after the outbreak of World War II, and shows a 4 ton Superpoise chassis, with rather stylish pantechnicon body, for removals and storage specialist Alfred Bell. Note how the bumper and bodysides have already received an application of white paint to help make the vehicle easier to spot during the blackout.

▼ According to the details on the back of the print, this normal control Bedford for the Clydebank Co-Op was registered after World War II, but SN 8832 was a 1938 Dunbartonshire issue. It's a classic example of bodybuilders having to use whatever chassis was available as, given the option, a longer wheelbase chassis might have been more suitable for this smart pantechnicon van bodywork, given that furniture is more bulky than heavy. Note the smart coach-lining, but rather austere cab screen and door design, built onto a Bedford 'chassis/scuttle'.

▼ Here's another Commer chassis delivered around the same time (1943) to Freeborn's of North London. This is also a 4 ton chassis – in this case with a 1400 cu ft capacity pantechnicon body, built on a 13 ft 9 ins wheelbase. The signwriting is pure 1930s 'Art Deco' but, sadly, the war put an end to 'Style' for many years to come.

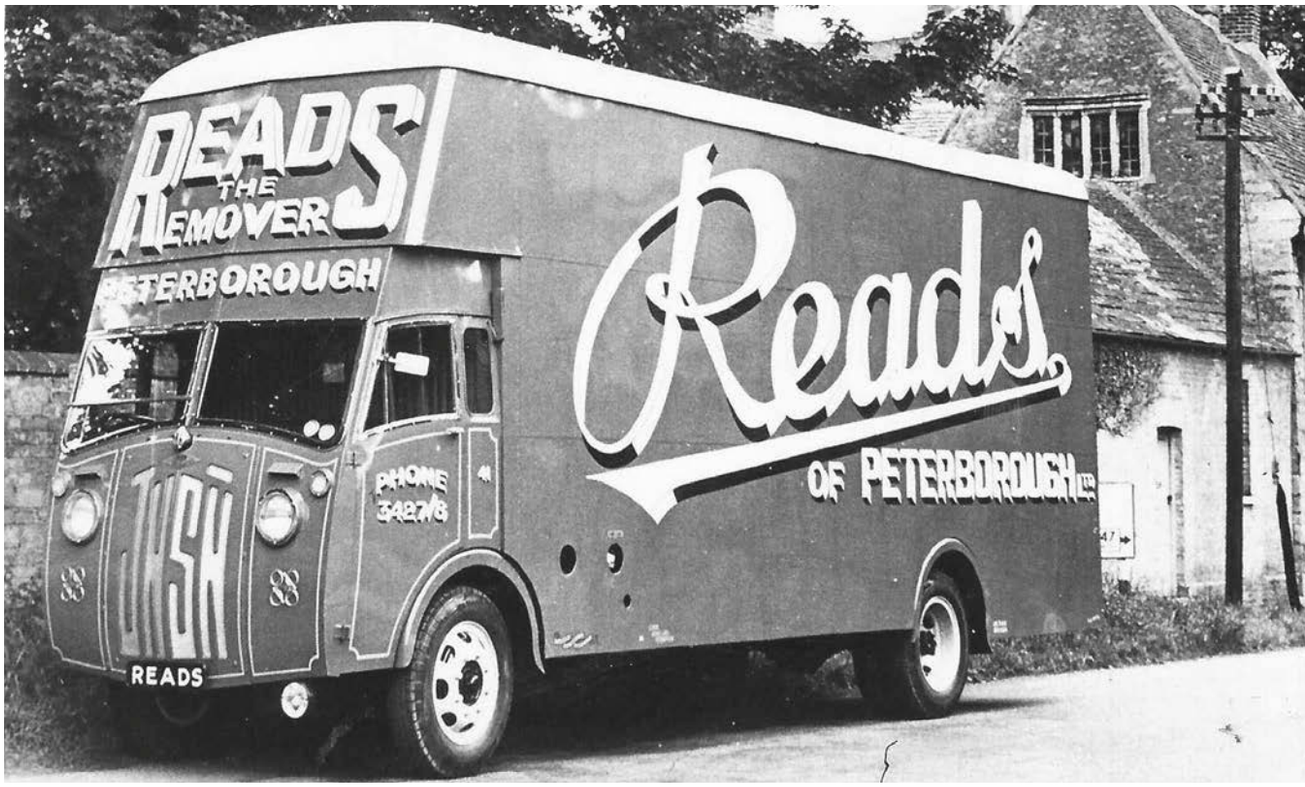
This early post-war Dodge has been converted to semi-forward control and has a full width cab, integrated into the rather smart pantechnicon bodywork, featuring curved glass quarter-lights. It looks quite spacious, but the limited size of the cab doors suggests easy entry and exit for the driver and crew wasn’t a top priority! Chances are that local Salisbury removals company Margerrison would have faced a hard time when road transport was nationalised.

Interestingly, Jensen used a photograph of a ‘real’ (un-retouched) pantechnicon vehicle for the brochure shots, yet also had a heavily retouched print prepared for the press release. This official company photograph shows how the airbrush artist has ‘cleaned-up’ the panelling and added some ‘highlights’, as well as the rather clumsy ‘shadow’ on which the vehicle is standing. It’s also interesting to note that there are several differences between this vehicle and the one featured on the brochure – one of which was, as the press release caption on the reverse suggests, the cubic capacity of the body. It’s now quoted as being a whopping 1870 cu ft, “Not including any tailboard load” we’re informed. How? The overall height given in the brochure was 13 ft 1 in, and the ‘streamlined’ Luton head already had capacity of 59 cu ft – so squaring it up is unlikely to have yielded another 250 cubic feet.

JNSN
LIGHTWEIGHT
DIESEL
CONSTRUCTED throughout of Alloy this vehicle is one of the most commodious on four wheels in the World.
Built to the highest engineering standards it combines extreme lightness with strength, rigidity and durability. It will appeal to many operators and particularly those concerned with the transportation of furniture, or light bulky goods which require to be carried under cover.
JENSEN MOTORS LIMITED, TELEGRAMS: "EXPERT" TELEPHONE: W.B. 1112 WEST BROMWICH, STAFFS.

Principal Dimensions:
Overall length 27ft. 6ins.
Overall width 7ft. 6ins.
Wheelbase 16ft. 2ins.
Load Capacity 5 tons
Unladen weight of complete vehicle 69 cwts.
Cubic Capacity 1632 cu. ft.
Height from ground to roof (laden) 13ft. 1in.
Height from platform to centre of roof 9ft. 6ins.
Depth of rear well from main platform 21ins.
Height of well floor from ground 22ins.
Interior width 7ft. 1in.
Interior length (excluding "Luton" portion) 23ft. 3ins.
Cubic capacity of "Luton" portion over cab 59 cu. ft.
★ Floor built of corrugated alloy with timber inserts.
★ Interior panelled with corrugated alloy to waistline.
★ Timber roping rails above waistline.
★ Easy loading by adjustable tailboard and rear well.
★ Vertical rear doors hinge right back and fasten to sides of body.
★ Spare wheel carried in special locker on off-side of vehicle
★ Comfortable seating in cab for crew of three.
★ High factor of safety due to low centre of gravity.
★ Alloy construction ensures immunity from rust and corrosion.

Remember the prewar ‘swan’ that was the Jensen ‘lightweight’ pantechnicon? Here’s the ‘ugly duckling’ it grew into, once production started after the war! Actually, that’s a bit unfair – perhaps the rather austere look of the radiator grill and cab design were more in keeping with the times than the flamboyant streamlining of the pre-war prototypes? Jensen was, of course, primarily a bodybuilder, so the semi-integral construction of the ‘JNSN’ chassis was, usually for a lorry, completed at the works in West Bromwich – making it one of the few commercial vehicles that was delivered, complete, ready for work, direct from the factory that made it. This policy also applied to large pantechnicon vans like this one, seen on the Jensen brochure. Constructed entirely of aluminium alloy, the body had a 1632 cu ft capacity on a 16 ft 2 ins wheelbase, yet still only weighed 69 cwts (3 tons 9 cwt). Overall length was 27 ft 6 ins - the maximum at that time on two axles.



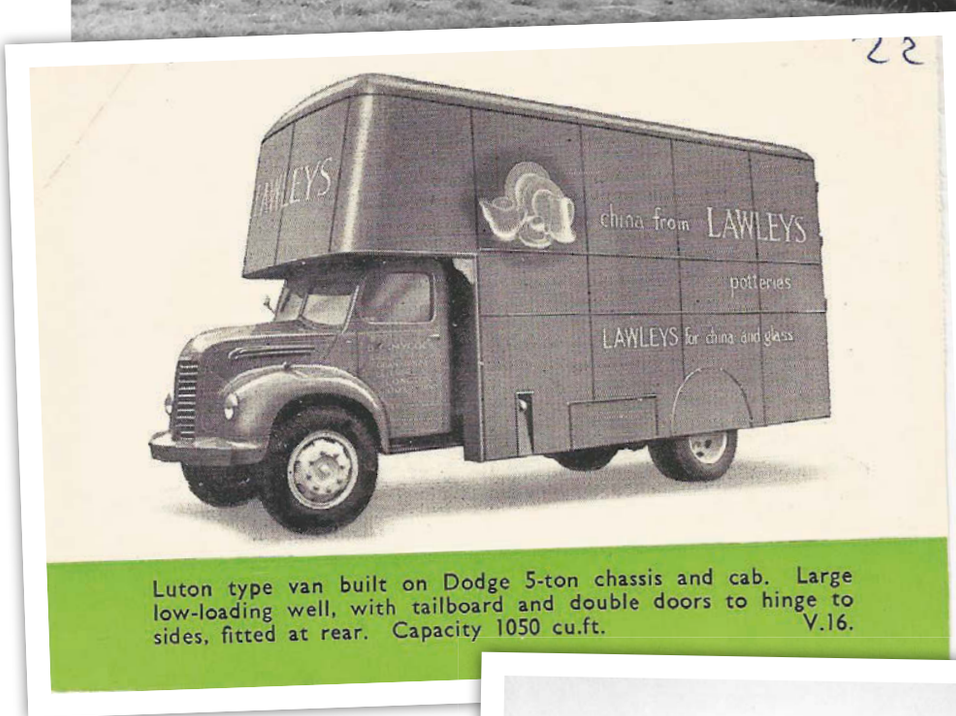
➤ Reads of Peterborough were clearly big fans of Jensens – there are several pictures of different Jensens in Reads livery in the archives. Here we have a brand new Perkins-engined Jensen pantechnicon van that has detailed differences to the body design from either the unit featured on the brochure or the press release photograph! Did Jensen actually build two alike? This example was an early production model, delivered in 1947.

➤ And finally, in our Jensen line-up, we see RBB 412 parked up in a rather foggy street outside the Siemens London HQ. Here the van bodywork is clearly more about 'image' than capacity – it has a lower overall height and features rather nice, but outdated 1930s-style 'streamlined' wing flourishes, in a contrasting colour to the main bodywork. The shape and design of the Luton head looks interesting – it appears to be a one-piece GRP moulding , rather than being aluminium panelled.

➤ Being of light unladen weight, Albion also had a strong following amongst operators of pantechnicon vans. Here we see a neat little 4-tonner. with a rather stylish integral cab design, featuring curved glass quarter-lights and rearward sliding doors. This would have required internal 'pockets' let into the main body area, thus taking up loadspace, but the overall appearance is very attractive.

➤ The same bodybuilder (sadly we don't know which) constructed this far less attractive pantechnicon body, on what looks like an Austin chassis, with a 'BMC Diesel' engine. In this case, conventional front hinged doors have been specified, by customer G W Brand & Sons of Farnborough, Hants.

▲ The semi-forward control postwar Dodge 'Parrot Nose' wouldn't be the first choice for operators requiring 'maximum cube' in relation to overall length, but this smart example has had the Luton head extended out over the bonnet to create a bit more payload space. It would – at a squeeze – have space for a driver and two loaders, however, which explains why many customers like Lincoln's of Bristol continued to specify normal and semi-normal control chassis for furniture removals work.


22
LAWLEYS
china from LAWLEYS
potteries
LAWLEYS for china and glass
Luton type van built on Dodge 5-ton chassis and cab. Large low-loading well, with tailboard and double doors to hinge to sides, fitted at rear. Capacity 1050 cu.ft. V.16.

▲ Here's another Dodge 'Parrot Nose' and, this time, we know the identity of the bodybuilder – it's Jennings of Sandbach, Cheshire. The 1050 cu ft capacity pantechnicon body – compare the capacity with that of the Jensen – is mounted on a 5 ton chassis, which retains the standard Airflow Streamlines cab. A clue as to why a five ton capacity chassis was specified can be got from the trade in which 'Lawleys' is engaged – it's china and pottery. A fair bit heavier than furniture!

▼ Furniture stores don't come much more famous than Waring & Gillow and the London W1 location of the store in the capital suggests some pretty well-heeled customers. But the location of this 1954 Bedford pantechnicon, OLU 416, is hinting that the company also enjoys Royal patronage as well, as it speeds by Buckingham Palace – clearly a good excuse for a press release!

▲ Here's another early post-war delivery - this time, a pre-war style Commer 'Superpoise' with 1000 cu ft pantechnicon body for Brittain's Furnishers, with stores in St Neots and Biggleswade. We note that the bodybuilder has retained the standard factory-built cab . It was completed in April 1946.

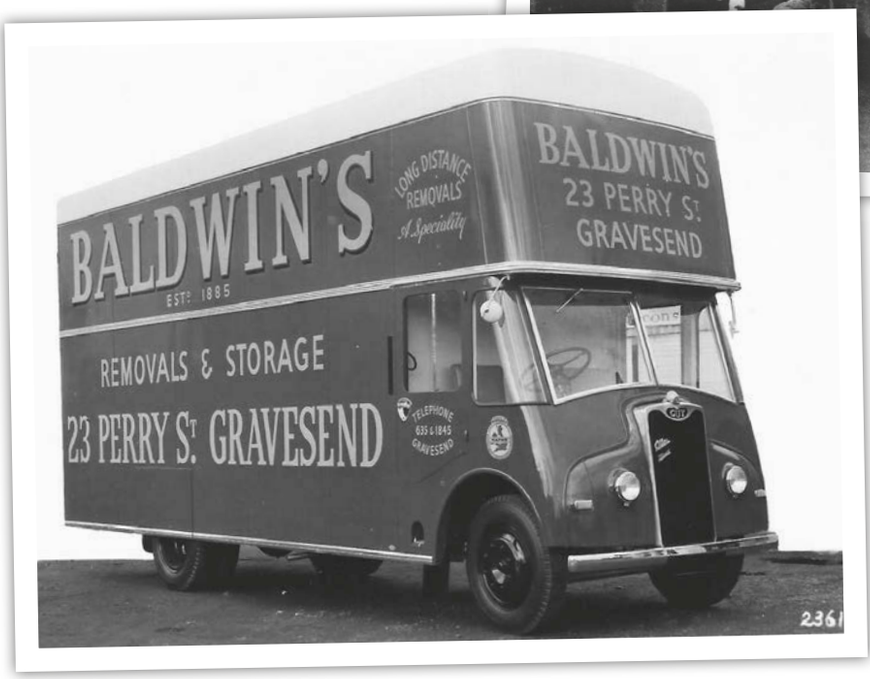
▲ This Bedford has been fitted with a Bonallack pantechnicon van body, built to meet the requirements of Joscelyne's Furnishers of Braintree and Bishops Stortford. The chassis has a wheelbase of 174 inches and BAN 858 was ready to be delivered in 1946.. Note that at last, it seems to be possible for vehicle manufacturers to feature a bit of chrome plating to brighten-up the grey post-war 'roadscene'.

▲ The low build of this AEC van body suggests it may have been built onto a chassis intended for passenger bodywork, rather than a conventional lorry chassis. Quite why the traditional AEC radiator has been ditched, in favour of a simple mesh grille, isn't explained in this official press photograph from the 'ACV Sales' publicity department, but we know it was ordered to transport the plastics products of British 'Celanese', rather than furniture.

▲ Here's another large capacity pantechnicon van based on a normal control chassis – in this case a Commer Q4 'Superpoise'. The Press Release photograph is dated 16th September 1950 and we know that the 1400 cubic feet body was built by Walkers of Watford. The chassis has a 45 inch extension by 'Baico' and the body and 'full-width' cab are constructed by the 'Walker Welded' method, rather than by a traditional coachbuilding methods involving timber ribs.

◀ Cox & Cox specified a 14 ft 10 ins wheelbase Guy Vixen chassis for this 1200 cu ft body. Unladen weight was just under 3 tons.

▼ Here’s another early post-war pantechnicon. It wasn’t just Pickfords that specified small Guy coachbuilt vans – here’s a nice one ready for delivery to Baldwins of Gravesend. The integral cab on this little ‘Otter Diesel’ has deep windows and wrap-around front screen, blending in nicely with the traditional radiator.



▲ As a designated producer of commercial vehicles for the forces and utility-pattern bus chassis throughout the war, Guy was in a good position to supply new vehicles to civilian customers as soon as government restrictions and steel quotas allowed. This early post-war Guy retains a somewhat austere appearance – a factor not helped by the rather uncompromising location of Guest Carriers London depot, ‘underneath the arches’, in Anton Street, Hackney, East London.

▼ And here’s what the early post-war era would have looked like if we’d had colour TV! This beautifully-restored Guy ‘Otter’ was originally operated by ‘Silentnight’ and has been restored back to its former glory. This photograph was issued by the company’s marketing department to celebrate it’s completion. Nice Job.

▲ Sadly, many commercial vehicle bodybuilders were slow to adopt colour photography for official purposes, so even well into the 1970s, many completed vehicles were only recorded in black and white – robbing us of the chance to see what colour they were finished in. Here we see a Commer 14-tonner (it isn't a ' Maxiload' 16-tonner), fitted with a pantechnicon body by Barnaby's.

▼ Here's another Barnaby's body – this time on a Thames Trader chassis. The driver of this high-sided van would doubtless have had trouble 'rowing' it against a head-wind as he plugged over the Yorkshire Moors! It was delivered in February 1965, so it could well have popped-up in an episode of 'Heartbeat' – had it actually been real life!

◀ This LAD-cabbed Dodge wasn't, as is rather obvious, designed to carry furniture, or beds. Finished in the striking blue and white livery of 'Birds Eye' Quick-frozen Foods, it was the star of the Dodge stand at the 1960 Commercial Motor Show, at the now destroyed Earls Court Exhibition Centre. It would have looked fantastic as it sped along the then recently completed M1 Motorway. Why such a high-sided fridge van with large Luton head and side skirts was needed to transport frozen peas, isn't recorded. But who cares? It looks great.

▼ Not the most attractive pantechnicon van to be mounted on an Albion chassis, this example originally used by Bentalls of Kingston-upon-Thames, then by removals specialist Alan Greenwood, features a rather dated Boalloy-style cab front panel, grafted onto the standard factory lower grill. But instead of the standard factory 'long door', the cab door is smaller with a traditionally high step height, dependent on a wheel nut guard ring for access. The wheelbase seems rather long in relation to the rear overhang as well.

NOT TAKING SIDES

PLATFORM BODIES

Flat platform bodies – or drays – are the general workhorses of the transport Industry and have been for many years. But nothing is as simple as it might at first appear. Some platform bodies might feature built-up side raves to enable crates or other cargo to be 'canted-in' towards the centre of the body to provide added stability, at a time when the only kind of 'load restraint' was a length of rope. Others might feature chain sides, or the favourite feature of the brewers, the cement manufacturers and the paper mills in particular – deep side valances – oddly a feature hardly ever seen on a contemporary dropside body.

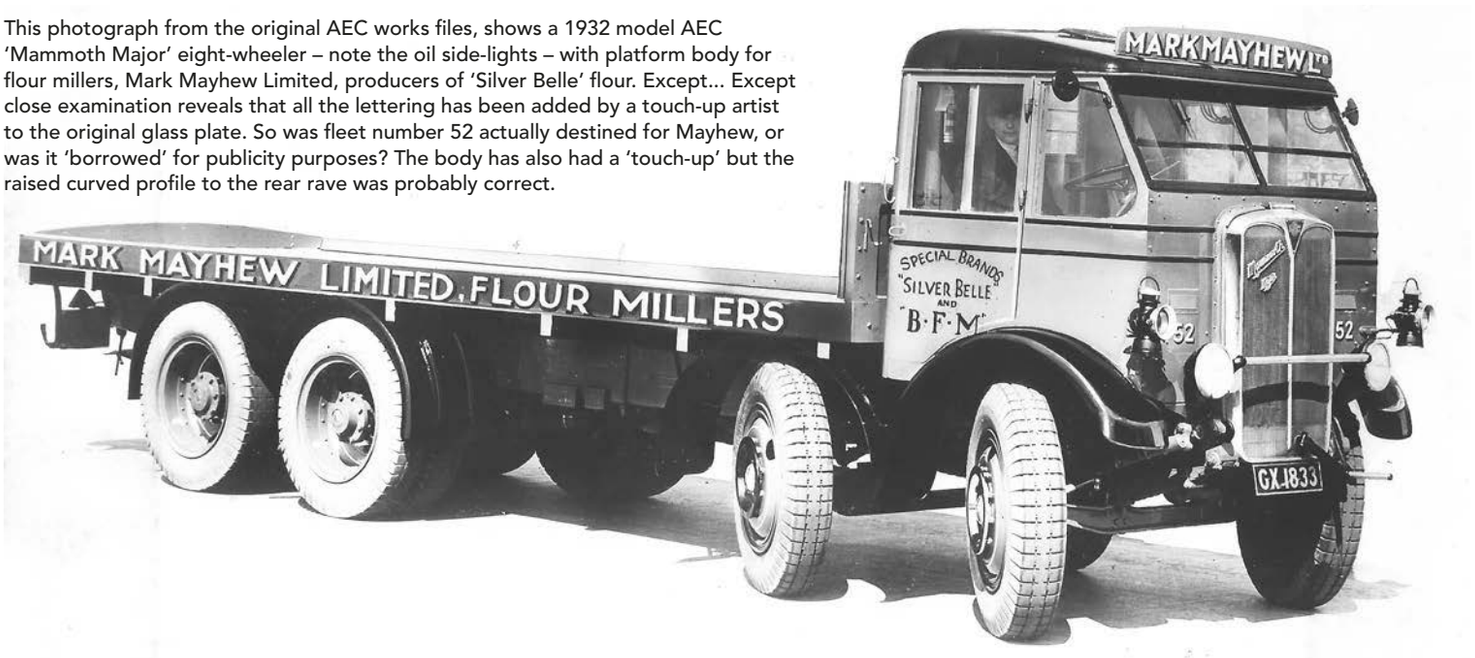
And if the load-bed was uncompromisingly 'flat', the same couldn't be said about the design and style of various bulkhead options. There might be a special cab roof rack for the stowage of sheets – a platform body would need expert roping and sheeting to avoid the load getting wet, or damaged by dust, or perhaps even frost. There might be a curved or semi-enclosed front bulkhead with signwriting – or a short-height rear 'rave' that might be fixed or hinged. Bodies for the drinks trade often featured a central 'spine' bulkhead against which crates could be stacked.

But the best thing about a flat platform body? Unlike a van, we can often get to see what load was being carried. And if some things stay the same in road transport – such as the fact that platform bodies are still the most common option seen on rigid chassis today – then the loads that are carried have changed considerably over the years. Where once, British-built lorries were photographed delivering loads to the docks for export, today, foreign-built chassis (most thankfully still with UK-built bodywork), will be collecting products that have been made – or grown – outside of the UK and imported, or otherwise produced here by foreign-owned companies.✣

➤ It might seem strange to us today that a load of fruit might be carried through London on an open-backed platform lorry, but this is exactly what we have here. It's August 1950 and this Atkinson eight-wheeler with flat platform body is delivering a load of fresh fruit to London's Borough Market. Not that it has necessarily come far – the load could well have come up from Kent, or been collected from a railway goods yard, as the lorry was part of the BRS Battersea Group in South-west London. In today's 'Elf and Safety' culture, the lack of ropes on every box of fruit would be frowned upon, but the six-high stacking looks pretty skillfully done. The weather must have been fine, but the driver has stacked his rolled-up sheets on top of the load – just in case!

1: The Sentinel Waggon Works (officially spelled with two 'g's by the company) made a point of advertising most new steam lorries complete with bodywork in a customer's livery, to stress the various industries that they served. Most were photographed outside the Shrewsbury factory, or more likely over the road in front of the workers' houses. In contrast, this 'waggon and drag' has been photographed on the road, running on trade-plates. Details on the reverse of the picture suggest it was published in 'Modern Transport' magazine in 1931 – the picture being taken in June. Crieve Haulage was based in New Ferry, Birkenhead, underlining the fact that Merseyside was something of a 'hot spot' for steam lorries at the time – and would remain so for many years. We note that the headboard on the trailer is at the front. A curious alternative was offered by Sentinel – placing the 'headboard' at the back of the trailer platform load-bed.
2: This 1930s Albion is fitted with a tall-raved platform body, with a half-height headboard, to take a 6 ton load. Note that the cab rear bulkhead features a large window and that the windscreen has unusually slim pillars. By rights, the colour of the LNER vehicle should be a pleasant mid-blue not far off 'Royal Blue', but what colour were the wheels, the waistband of the cab and the panel on the body onto which the lettering has been applied?

This photograph from the original AEC works files, shows a 1932 model AEC 'Mammoth Major' eight-wheeler – note the oil side-lights – with platform body for flour millers, Mark Mayhew Limited, producers of 'Silver Belle' flour. Except... Except close examination reveals that all the lettering has been added by a touch-up artist to the original glass plate. So was fleet number 52 actually destined for Mayhew, or was it 'borrowed' for publicity purposes? The body has also had a 'touch-up' but the raised curved profile to the rear rave was probably correct.



It's 1938 and here we see an alternative approach to a wagon-and-drag for the transport of more bulky items – a stretched lighter-duty lorry chassis with a chassis extension and 'Boys' third axle conversion. Heydon's of Walsall has specified this 1938 Bedford WLG with a wooden platform body, featuring both a tall front headboard and a fixed rear tailboard, to help ensure boxes of fruit, or sacks of potatoes, don't fall off the body during transport and get run over by Walsall's smart new trolleybuses!

➤ It’s March 1939 now and this smart Foden DG4 platform lorry – with 15 ft long platform – is due to be delivered to Blue Circle Cement. It still needs to be registered, before entering service, but it wouldn’t be unusual for a large organisation to do this locally. We know the colours – yellow with blue wings and cab ‘flash’ – and we know the Foden was powered by a Gardner diesel engine. The feature of interest is the ‘Cement Marketing Co’ headboard and the style of the fleet number on the cab.

➤ Every now and then, the original picture caption has survived on archive photographs and this is one of those times. We learn that the official AEC photographer took this picture in March 1939 , right outside the Goods Inwards department at AEC’s Southall works. That’s the Great Western Railway up on the embankment, which had a direct rail connection and siding into the works – a couple of goods trucks being visible in the background. These four ‘Mammoth Major’ six-wheeled chassis have flat platform bodywork by Baileys Bodybuilders Limited, sporting the deep side valances that were to remain popular on newsprint transport for several decades. We learn that, in addition to these four new wagons, four more new AECs were on order. Bowater & Lloyds Sales Company Limited (as the company was described), will then “have over 80 AECs in service employed in the transport of newsprint” as the press release caption would have it. One curious detail – famed for leaving the ‘detail’ of the cab provision to customer and dealer to sort out, this time AEC is claiming that the cabs on these four... “except for minor modifications, are of standard pattern.” Which, of course, isn’t the same thing as actually saying AEC built them!

F.B.T.
FREEGUARD BROTHERS TRANSPORT Co NEWPORT. MON. 4981 2
LONDON · NEW CROSS 3480 1.
BIRMINGHAM · SMETHWICK 0736
LIVERPOOL · ROYAL 2191
DW 9946

➤ This fine pair of Scammell six-wheeled rigid platform lorries appear to have been photographed in the yard, directly outside in the Scammell factory, prior to delivery to Freeguard Brothers Transport of Newport, Monmouthshire (as it was then). DW 9946 and it’s sister vehicle are fitted with what might be termed the ‘first generation’ of ‘super-single’ or ‘balloon’ tyres. Fitted with basic platform bodies, nonetheless they have a most imposing appearance.

1: We're still in the pre-war era here, with this smart Leyland 'Beaver' 7-tonner platform lorry - although it actually went into service with Leyland Motors in 1940. The photograph however was taken in 1972, on the HCVC Trans-Pennine run.

2: Here we have a photograph taken by the official Scammell photographer Gregg Couper, showing an early post-war Scammell rigid eight-wheeler fitted with a rather stylish flat platform body, with flared-in half-height headboard and raised – possibly drop-down – tailboard. Still in factory primer and un-registered – and with the caption information sticker on the reverse of the print removed by the printer's block-maker, there is little more that can be added.

Sentinel was always good at publicity, which makes it doubly tragic that the company was unable to win a larger, more viable share of the goods and passenger vehicle market – and that for railcars and locomotives for that matter – having made the giant leap from steam to diesel far later than it should have. Sentinel wasn't the only manufacturer to suffer reliability problems with early diesel engines and although unusual, the flat, underfloor engine location had the advantage of providing accommodation for a driver and two loaders if required – but, although the lack of heat from the engine in the cab would be welcome in summer, it could be missed in winter! Sliding door cabs also had advantages in tight factory and wharf sites built for nothing wider than a horse-drawn cart, so this "4-cylinder Sentinel 7/8 ton chassis with 18 ft 6 ins long platform body designed for trailer work" (as it was described) seemingly had it all. Sentinels were popular with brewers and millers – both industries having heavy, high-value products to transport. This example was a cut above 'beer', however, in that Paten & Co were 'wine shippers and whisky blenders' as well as 'beer bottlers'. A new Sentinel and all you can drink. Sounds like a great place to work as a driver, osifer!

Here's a gem. It's a rather long wheelbase AEC six-wheeler, with a cab and platform body built by Lee Motors. Oddly, it shows the AEC when new parked in a smart suburban street, rather than in an industrial or 'works' setting. It still looks new, as no registration number is visible, so perhaps it was taken close to Lee Motors premises before delivery? Of greater interest is that the picture was actually made into a postcard and sent to 'Steve' Stevens-Stratten, the founding editor of 'Vintage Roadscene' magazine, in 1984. It was sent by Peter R Daniels of Salisbury, Wilts, and was offering the use of "over 35,000" photographs of lorries from his collection. "I would be happy to let you use my pictures whenever you are working on your next book," he confirmed. So the question is, where are they all now?

▲ Another early post-war AEC – and another example ordered by Bowaters Paper Mills. ‘MUL 668’ is seen in later life at one of the much-loved – but often rather crowded – CVRTC events at the Crick Truckstop. This picture was taken in 1991, and shows the deep valanced platform body used to carry rolls of newsprint direct from Bowater’s mill at Sittingbourne, Kent, up to Fleet Street. To unload, the drivers of newsprint wagons would have to park in narrow back streets and alleyways, to enable the heavy rolls of newsprint to be craned off, so sliding cab doors came in very useful – making it possible for the driver to access the platform directly from the cab if required. The deep cab headboard was designed to take the extra sheeting that was required to make sure the paper didn’t get wet during transit.

➤ Here’s another example of an unlikely use of a flat platform body. Peas! Clearly, Batchelors Peas didn’t use this 1954-registered Atkinson to collect the peas directly from the fields. In fact, it was used to deliver canned peas, soup, vegetables and fruit, to wholesalers and chain store groups for local distribution. We learn that the bodywork and final paintwork was undertaken by Freeman, Oakes & Co Ltd, of Sheffield, South Yorkshire, and that it was painted green. The platform body was constructed in aluminium, with a hardwood floor, with low raves, to allow for the easy loading of pallets of cans – something worthy of mention back in 1954, when ‘hand balling’ was still the norm. This official press release photograph is unusual in that it was issued by Freeman Oakes & Co, and not by Atkinson Vehicles.

➤ Sometimes the press releases sent to transport industry magazines came from neither chassis manufacturer or bodybuilder, and this is one of those times. This picture of Sidney Smith's new Guy 'Otter' platform lorry came from the publicity department of Frank Perkins, the then still up-and-coming manufacturer of 'high speed' diesel engines – a term cannily used to differentiate Perkins diesels from traditional old sloggers like Gardners and, perhaps more relevant in the context of Guy Motors, the troublesome – and often quoted as 'gutless' – Meadows diesels. Here we see the famous Perkins badge proudly fitted to the radiator grill of the Otter, while noting that Guy was still producing petrol engined goods chassis for the removals trade. Here, quiet running would have been an operational advantage early in the morning in residential streets! Alas, we're not told how many sacks of 'Drummer Boy' milled oats could be carried on the platform body, but the answer was probably a good ton more than it was designed for!

➤ The Foden FE4/8 featured one of the most distinctive cabs of any post-war lorry range, and was ideally suited to urban distribution operations, where the driver had to be in and out of the cab all day. The front step-ahead-of-the-wheelarch was a big help in that respect, but the rear-hinged 'suicide' cab door was something of a mixed blessing – and already out of fashion on passenger cars. Looking immaculate in 'fridge white', the newly-constructed platform body features deep valances in the style also favoured by brewers, paper manufacturers and more recently by the cement manufacturers. The valances have less to do with platform strength and more to do with 'image'. Ahhh, Hovis. It may well arguably be as good today as it's ever been, but the lorries that once delivered it (or the flour it was made from) used to be much nicer!

➤ A lorry made immortal by the famous Dinky Toys diecast model, this Leyland 'Comet' is posing for W H Wood, the photographer employed by bodybuilder Bonnallack, to go with a company press release. Based on other examples of real lorries that ended up as diecast models, it's highly likely that this – or a sister vehicle – was also exhibited at the Commercial Motor Show, where researchers from Dinky Toys would have seen it. The iconic maroon Maudslay/Harrington horsebox was another example. The photograph appears to be taken against the backdrop of some imposing building in the City of London, but what might be mistaken for a park in the foreground is more likely to be a wartime bomb site.

On reflection, it’s surprising that the ERF ‘KV’ cab was the success it was, taking into account how ‘conservative’ the road transport industry bosses were (that’s both with and without a capital ‘C’ in most cases!) and that arch-competitor Atkinson tried – and failed – to wean customers away from ‘old fashioned’ exposed radiators over several decades. Here we see an official press release photograph showing an ERF68G eight-wheeled platform lorry for Lloyds Transport & Warehousing Company Limited of Water Street, Manchester. The signwriter has been at work with his ‘pin-striping’ brush on the cab, but has also picked out the raves of the platform.

▲ This is an unusual photograph, in that it shows a new lorry in the process of being delivered to the customer on trade-plates. These were normally removed before the picture was taken, even if the vehicle wasn’t licensed. There’s another mystery too – the Foden was built in Sandbach, Cheshire – obviously – but the customer was A A Griggs, transport contractor from Soham in Cambridgeshire. So why was this photograph taken by a professional photographer based in Burslem, Stoke-on-Trent? Could it be that the bodybuilder was located there? Griggs was still based in Cambridgeshire in 2001, but by then was buying new Volvos.

1: Here's a scene from one of the famed 'Lorry Driver of the Year' competitions. 'WKC 800' might only be a humble Austin 'E14C' rather than a premium specification AEC or Leyland, but that hasn't stopped the transport manager at Tate & Lyle going way over the top on the cab. Built of GRP, it replaces the standard factory offering of a Willenhall cab, as featured on the Austin FE in the background. The smartly-lettered platform body has a half height headboard, to enable the driver to utilise the twin cab rear bulkhead windows but, aside from the rather odd-shaped cab quarterlights (why have them with wrap-around screens?), there's another mystery to be answered – why has this 'Austin' been fitted with a 'Morris' grille?
2: Registered TBM 638 (Bedfordshire, 1957), this two-axle Foden will have it's work cut out, carrying loads of Leighton Buzzard fired tiles. Note that the platform body has a rear fixed tailboard, as well as a half-height headboard to keep the loose, almost certainly manually-loaded, tiles secure during transit.
3: We'll take a look at more specialised bodywork – and loads – in a future issue of 'Road Transport Archive', but here is an example of a flatbed lorry with chains, which wasn't specified by a brewery! This 1960 Atkinson six-wheeler was fitted with a Bonallack platform body and chains much like the iconic Dinky Toys Foden eight-wheeler. But instead of delivering barrels and crates of beer, it seems to have been used to deliver 40-gallon drums of oil for Fina Petroleum. At first glance, it appears to be distinctly old-fashioned for a lorry dating from the 1960s, but the rear hydraulic tail lift and alloy body help confirm the date on the back of the print.
4: True, this isn't a real life, roped-and-sheeted load on Alan Firmin's wonderful AEC 'Mammoth Major' wagon and drag platform outfit, as AF 105 is seen here on the sea-front at Brighton in 2001, in preservation. But to all intents and purposes, it could have been carrying produce up to London from Kent farms – the one-time 'Garden of England' – just as it would have done when the author first saw it in Alan Firmin's depot in Hunton, Kent, back in 1968.

Above left: Talking of looking 'old-fashioned'? Even under Leyland control, Albions retained a traditional look, until the arrival of the LAD cab. That helped create an active market in alternative designs of cabs by various bodybuilders. But this is what a period factory-built Albion platform lorry would have looked like – although this is a preserved example in Fagan & Whalley colours, seen at the 1995 Trans-Pennine Run. Above right: ...And this is what they could have produced! Look familiar? It's the prototype of the Lesney 1-75 'Matchbox' model – or close to it. The deep valanced platform body features lettering telling us how wonderful Portland Cement was, while the GRP cab manages to blend with the traditional Albion radiator perfectly.

BECAUSE WE ALL NEED SOME SUPPORT

DROPSIDERS

Flat platform bodies – or drays – are the general workhorses of the transport Industry and have been for many years. But nothing is as simple as it might at first appear. Some platform bodies might feature built-up side raves to enable crates or other cargo to be ‘canted-in’ towards the centre of the body to provide added stability, at a time when the only kind of ‘load restraint’ was a length of rope. Others might feature chain sides, or the favourite feature of the brewers, the cement manufacturers and the paper mills in particular – deep side valances – oddly a feature hardly ever seen on a contemporary dropside body.

▲ Let’s start off with an absolute cracking dropsider. Here we see a brand new Sentinel ‘S6’ on the opposite side of the road to the Sentinel works in Shrewsbury. It’s quite clear from the signwriting that use of the word ‘steam’ in this context was confirmation that should a potential customer have a heavy transport job that needed doing, ‘The City Steam Transport Company of Bath’ wouldn’t be turning up with a 2 ton Fordson and hope for the best! What is interesting, however, is that a company in the business of supplying sand gravel and tarmac didn’t specify a tipping body – the likely reason being in this case that the manufacture of heavy hydraulic cylinders capable of tipping a twelve ton load were not yet readily available and even had they been, the added weight would have undermined the payload of this six-wheeler.

How high do you want to go? The height of the sides on a commercial vehicle body my be measured in ‘planks’ – three or four being the standard number – but as a look through the archives will confirm, there will always be a customer that requires something different. Companies engaged in transporting pipes, or flat sheets of steel, might specify a single plank sided body, while a farmer or grower might require a body where the sides are equal in height to the top of the cab roof.

‘Wood’ of course remained the material of choice for most commercial vehicle bodybuilders, long after steel or aluminium sheet became widely available. Why? Because while aluminium was light in weight, if it took a direct hit, the floor, bulkhead and sides of a lorry body could be severely damaged,

▲ This normal control AEC ‘Majestic’ from 1930 is about to be delivered to Saltend Transport of Hedon, Hull, and features a stout dropside body of wooden construction. It’s interesting to note that the forward control heavy lorry was still not the universal choice of hauliers in the 1930s – and indeed, normal control would hold out in the medium weight sector until the early 1960s. The phrase ‘Any Ware to Anywhere’ has been used by several transport companies over the years – and can still be seen today.

▲ **1:** This photograph of a 1931 normal control Dennis 2-tonner seems to have been re-issued by the public relations agency acting for wine producer Burgoyne's but, sadly, the only information we can glean from the sticker on the reverse was that Burgoynes apparently found it to be a "tough, highly reliable vehicle". This is good to know and justifies the purchase of a quality motor rather than, say, a cheaper lorry from Ford or the newly-available Bedford brand. It does confirm, though, that premium brands like Dennis tended to find favour with brewers and the suppliers of other drinks like... well 'Empire Wines'. Note how the high-sided body on GW 9258 doesn't feature drop-down sides. **2:** This little 1936 forward control Vulcan with neat dropside body for transport contractor, F W Robinson & Sons of Rotherham, would have been ideal for accessing the narrow entry ways to those 'dark satanic mills' and other industrial premises that were designed and built at a time when a 'lurry' was horse-drawn. Promoted as a 3½-tonner, we're told the dropsides were 'detachable' – presumably to enable slightly over-width bales of wool to be loaded – but then the sides on most dropsiders were, anyway. It was supplied by Vulcan Motors main dealer, J O Motors of Glossop Road, Sheffield.

▲ Here's another Vulcan dropsider. This one is a 45 cwt normal control chassis, fitted with a basic body, with single-section dropsides. The picture was taken in February 1933 and, judging by the heavy weight in the body – which looks like a test 'tank' full of sand, as there are heavy lifting eyes on both sides to crane it on and off – we can assume that it is undergoing a road test for 'Modern Transport' magazine. Note the Vulcan is also on trade-plates.

whereas in contrast, a wooden body would 'give' and cushion the shock. The archives show some steel bodies with mesh sides – a feature still widely used today. Not all 'dropsiders' actually feature sides that can be dropped – a number of trades, the early vehicles used to deliver cans of petrol and oil products fro example – continued to use fixed-sided bodywork to provide protection from drums tipping over on corners.

Looking at today's 'roadscene', there are certainly fewer dropsiders than vans, curtain-siders or artics carrying containers. When did you last see a brand new four-axle rigid with a traditionally built wooden dropside body?

All the more reason to go back in time and a look at some classic British 'wagons' going about their business then? ✣

➤ Here’s a serious dropside lorry! RH 3349 is a 1931 Scammell rigid six-wheeler and has been photographed beside the famous allotments over the road from the Scammell works – this time by a photographer from Reynolds Photography of North Kensington. While the archives reveal a number of vehicles operated by the likes of Blue Circle and Tunnel Cement, we don’t find many from independent manufacturers such as G & T Earle, as here. Based near Sheffield, the wooden dropside body has been boldly signwritten, to make it perfectly clear what line of business the company was in. We note that in order to keep the precious load from getting wet, the bodybuilder has provided a central frame, to enable a tarpaulin to be erected over the load, without coming into direct contact with it. The end result would resemble a large ridge tent on wheels – albeit on six very impressive wheels!

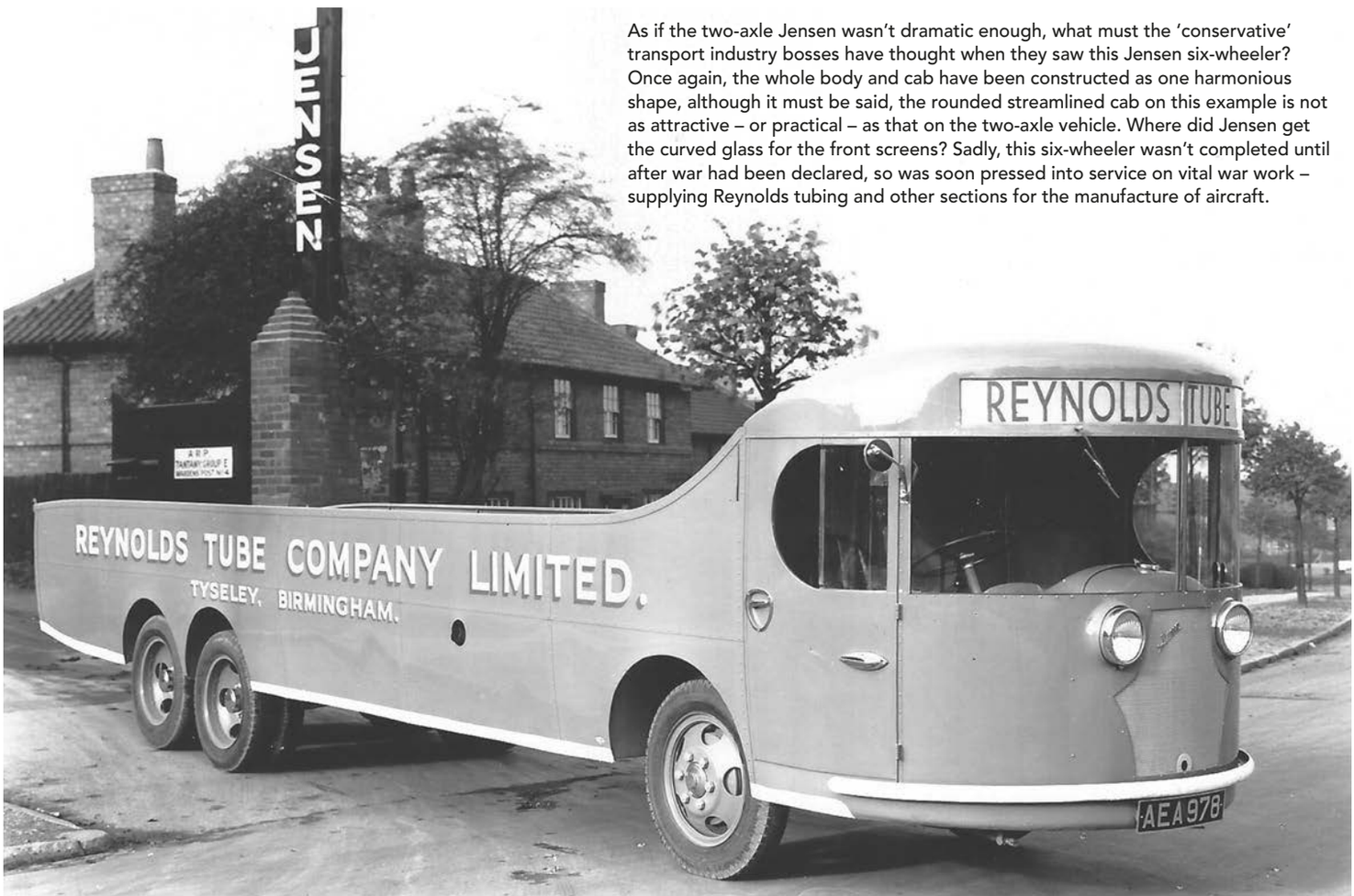
➤ About to be delivered to the customer around the same time as the rigid six-wheeler to Earle’s Cement, Messrs Stanton were taking delivery of this two-axle Scammell with a neat, matching draw-bar trailer. Once again, the photograph was taken by Reynolds Photography with the allotments in Tolpits Lane as a backdrop.

➤ The dropside body on this Leyland ‘Beaver’ four-wheeler is of heavy duty construction – as well it might. Imperial Chemical Industries had works around the country, from Teeside to, as here, Widnes. We get the impression that whatever load this Leyland was expected to carry ‘hazardous’ would probably describe it. The raves are especially strengthened and there’s a stout set of side-guards to prevent anyone – or any other vehicle – getting trapped within the rather long wheelbase. The photograph was taken by the Leyland Motors publicity department and formed the basis of a press release in 1934.

The 'Ex-Army Transport Limited' was founded by soldiers returning from World War I and the company clearly hoped to win trade on the basis that they'd 'Done Their Bit' for King and Country and, as such, deserved some respect. Patriotism is, however, a fickle thing – especially in Britain where flying the national flag on any other day than at half-mast at a time of disaster is seen as odd. What is equally odd is the third-axle conversion, which has just been fitted to this Leyland dropsider. The picture seems to have been taken in 1934 and, while we might expect such a truncated rear end to be fitted with a trailer hitch, none has been fitted. In fact it looks very much as though the non-steering third-axle was 'shoe-horned' onto the existing rear overhang of the chassis with no further modification. But why?

Above left: We tend to think of fixed-sided bodies as something more likely to be found on lightweight pick-up trucks, rather than heavy goods vehicles, but the Jensen was something on an exception. While post-war production versions did indeed feature more conventional bodywork, the whole design philosophy behind the Jensen was one of lightness and strength. The lightness was critical, in that it enabled the Jensen driver to travel at 30 mph, rather than 20 mph. And the strength from design integrity was clearly needed because, unlike just about every other commercial vehicle on the road, the Jensen didn't have a chassis. Instead, the strength came from a rigid monocoque made up of alloy sections – so in effect, the bodywork was also expected to take the stress. Here we see one of the prototype Jensen dropside lorries, supplied to the Reynolds Tube Company. This official photograph was taken by local photographer, Sidney Darby & Son, of West Bromwich, on what looks like a freezing February morning in 1939, and shows the dramatic 'streamlined' styling of the integral body and the deep side valances that all production Jensens were to retain. Above right: In this rear view, we see the distinctive 30 mph roundel and note that AEA 200 weighed-in at only 2 tons, 6 cwt and 2 lbs – well below the 3 ton threshold.

As if the two-axle Jensen wasn't dramatic enough, what must the 'conservative' transport industry bosses have thought when they saw this Jensen six-wheeler? Once again, the whole body and cab have been constructed as one harmonious shape, although it must be said, the rounded streamlined cab on this example is not as attractive – or practical – as that on the two-axle vehicle. Where did Jensen get the curved glass for the front screens? Sadly, this six-wheeler wasn't completed until after war had been declared, so was soon pressed into service on vital war work – supplying Reynolds tubing and other sections for the manufacture of aircraft.



▲ Here we see AEA 948 once again – this time in wartime matt paint with black-out masks on those rather bug-like headlights. Oddly, no kerbside cab door seems to have been fitted, but even more amazing is the fact that, even as a six-wheeler, the Jensen was still less than 3 tons unladen!

▲ Possibly also engaged on vital war work is this AEC ‘Mammoth Major’ operated by Thomas Tilling. Already fitted with headlamp black-out masks and white edges to the mudguards, DLT 461 was new in 1937 and fitted with a two-plank timber dropside body. It is also pulling a two-axle draw-bar trailer.

➤ The most impressive Fodens operated by the Albion Sugar Company may well have been streamlined tankers, but here we note that the company also operated Foden dropsiders as well. Fleet number 14 has a high, four-plank dropside body with cab roof-mounted sheet rack behind the name board.

1: Here we have a post-war production model Jensen photographed outside Norwich Castle. Eastern Growers Marketing Association would have been able to run this Jensen as an 'own account' vehicle on an A-License, rather than put the destiny of their crops into the hands of the newly state-run British Railways or fledgling BRS. Post-war Jensens retained the ability to run at 30 mph – it doesn't sound like any big deal but that was 33% faster than a normal 'heavy'. Besides, there would have still been many old wagons on the road that would have been hard-pushed to run at 30 even if it was legal! Here we see that the standard production body could be had with drop-down sides but, of course, the key contrast was that the entire body was made of aluminium alloy, rather than wood, reinforced with iron work as was still the norm. **2:** Reads of Peterborough was a notable user of Jensens and clearly the company put 'a smart image' high on it's agenda. This 6 ton dropsider has just loaded produce from a ship in London Docks and is about to have it's load sheeted – although this would probably only be to protect it from the weather, rather than as a load security issue. We note the boxes have been neatly stacked onto the top rave of the bodysides to cant them inwards. Jensen was one of the first manufacturers to promote the new Perkins 'High Speed' P6 diesel engine and we see that EG 8656 sports not one, but two Perkins badges, to match the twin 'Notec' fog lamps. This photograph was taken in November 1948. **3:** In contrast, here's a classic Guy 'Vixen' in what might be termed 'oily rag' condition. The picture was taken at the Guy Owners Club rally at Dunstall Road Racecourse, Wolverhampton in April 1990, and while it has acquired modern flashing indicators, very little else seems to have changed since it was new. **4:** This 1952 ERF is ready for delivery to Batchelors Peas Limited, based in Worksop. We're talking canned peas here, rather than frozen, so there was no need for a fridge van body. But wouldn't a box van have been a better bet than a dropsider - even one as smart as this?

If only we could travel back in time and be with the photographer from Wolverhampton-based 'Industrial Photography Services', as he lines up the shot of this Guy 'Otter Diesel' dropsider, with what the caption describes as "the new improved cab". It's March 1950 and, indeed, the Otter does look less austere than some earlier models, but 'improved' only seems to stretch to a few more curved panels, what looks like more comfortable seats (looking after the driver was never a top priority for British lorry manufacturers, until too late, they realised how much better imported Continental vehicles were) and a dash of chrome. But what we'd really like to see is a new Wolverhampton trolleybus swish by on what looks like recently-erected overhead. If only...

▲ There is a stern warning stamped on to the reverse of this official Bedford press release photograph: “Not to be published before February 14th 1957”, we’re told. Why? Was it some revolutionary new version of the already well established ‘S-Type”? Not really. The ‘new’ feature was the revised upper section of the radiator grill with a mesh section containing the individual ‘Bedford’ lettering and a less fussy bit of chrome trim. We’re told that the S-Type can “now be ordered either with the standard 300 cubic inch petrol engine” (for which there were unlikely to be many takers by this time), or “the Perkins ‘R6’ or 351 cubic inch Leyland Diesel” Initially, the latter was only available for export orders. But what we’re more interested in, is the standard dropside timber body – Bedford was one of the few chassis manufacturers to feature complete vehicles in it’s sales catalogues and supplied these stylish rear mud-wings to ensure a neat, overall appearance – just look at your Dinky Supertoys model ‘Big Bedford’ dropsider. It has them. What this brand new lorry doesn’t seem to have – as yet – are indicators.

▲ For some reason, it took until November 1958 for Modern Transport magazine’s road tester to get his hands on a new model Bedford S-Type, but here he’s just arrived at a local Vauxhall Bedford dealer, to add a measured amount of fuel into the special test tank, mounted on the front headboard. The dropside body is loaded to maximum payload. We hope some attempt has been made to secure the concrete blocks as a wooden dropside body won’t be capable of doing so in an ‘Emergency Stop’!

Here's another wagon destined for the A A Griggs fleet in Soham, Cambridgeshire. This Foden is fitted with a sturdy three-plank timber dropside body with tapered headboard.

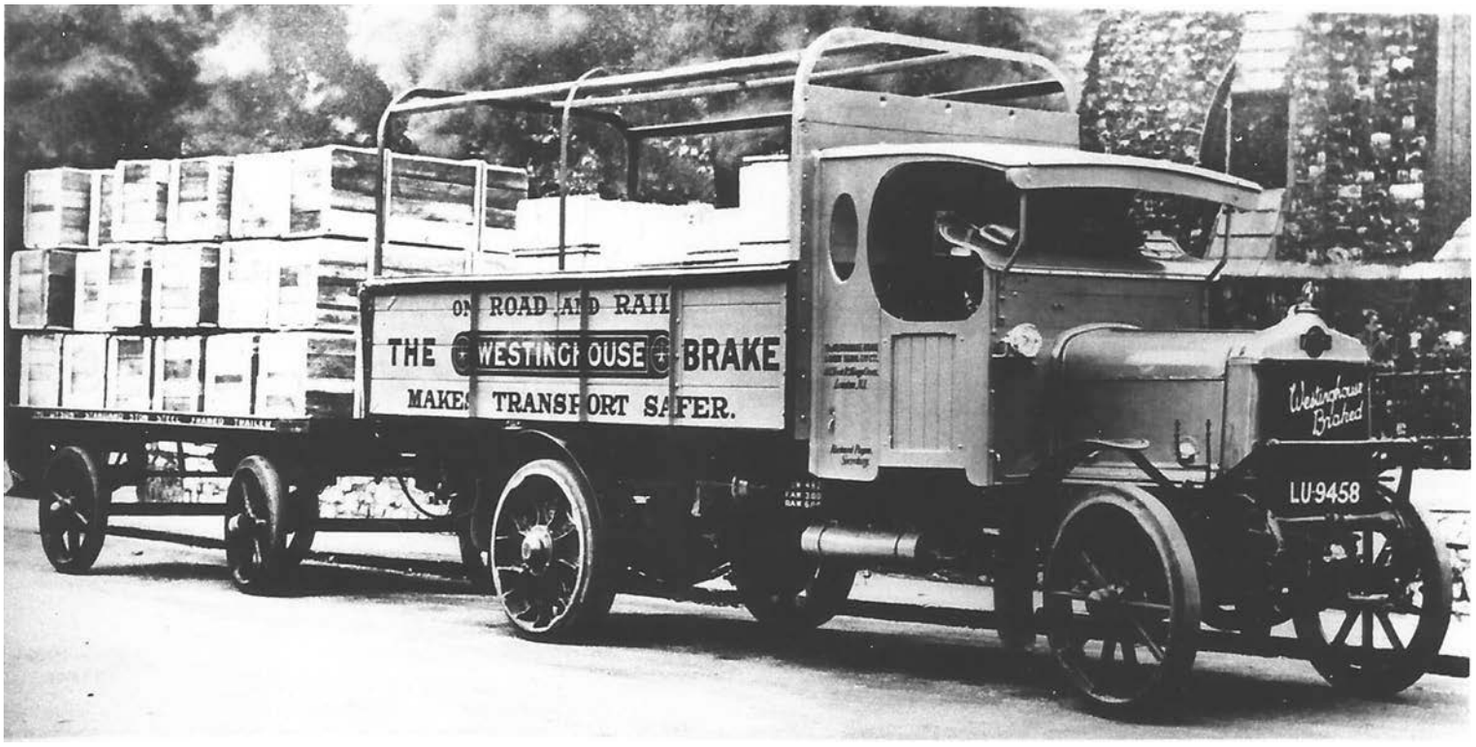
The twin-steer 6x2 chassis, with truncated rear body overhang 'for trailer work' was very much in fashion in the late 1930s, but less so by the late-1950s. So this Leyland 'Steer' was something of a rare beast, even when new. Even when running solo, the 'Chinese Six' had unladen weight advantages over an 8x4 chassis (which had a heavy, double drive rear bogie), so in payload capability, it often made sense. This 1959 dropside-bodied Steer is seen here in the colours of J A Ford with a neat, sheeted load, but was originally a box van operated by London Carriers.

This official Ford Motor Company press photograph was seemingly part of the launch press pack for the new Thames Trader range in 1957. As was the fashion at the time – and, of course, as is now much easier to achieve in this 'Photoshop' age – the original image has had the attentions of a retouching artist to 'clean-up' the tyres and add a rather odd front number plate, 3447 F. Unusually however, the purposeful factory timber dropside body – notice the neat ribbed Ford-supplied two-piece rear mud-wings – has been given a roped and sheeted 'load'. Judging by the rear wheel tyre clearance, it didn't weigh very much! The Trader was the first commercial chassis to be delivered with distinctive 'branded' rear lamps and indicators with 'Ford' lettering in white. Remember, this picture was used in the 'Swift' picture book of commercial vehicles.

GO ON, JUST ONE MORE CRATE

TILT & MARKET BODIES

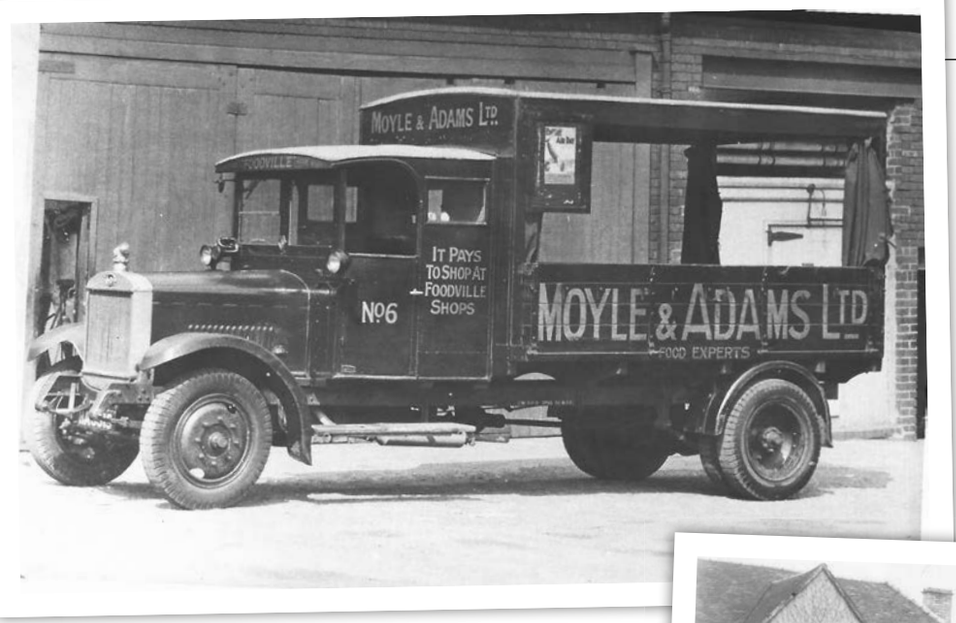
Fixed sided bodies with hoops for the fitting of some form of canvas tilt were a direct left-over from horse-drawn cart days. The sides were primarily fixed for strength, because most horse-drawn carts retained a wooden ‘chassis’. This would be lighter than metal and provided some form of flexibility over rough roads, wood was more forgiving: in contrast, iron was both heavy and brittle. There was another factor, a canvas tilt was cheap and versatile. To take a large or over-height load, it could be rolled-back or removed altogether.



The driver of this venerable WW1-pattern AEC ‘Y-Type’, registration LU 9458, will have his work cut out tackling steep hills, especially with the added weight of that ‘dangler’. But perhaps more on his mind would have been a strategy to scrub-off some speed when going down a steep hill – noting that the trailer has no form of braking! The irony? The Westinghouse brake was designed to ‘Make Transport Safer’ according to the signwriting on the fixed-sided wooden body designed to take a tilt cover. In fact, brakes as such are in short supply here – the front axle doesn’t seem to have any either – so the main retardation comes from a transmission brake. As the radiator carries the legend “Westinghouse braked” ,we can only hope that what braking capability there is proves to be enough – as a run-away would have been a Public Relations disaster.

Early motorised commercial road vehicles might have had more power than a team of horses, but the fact was that a tilt body was still a very economic way of protecting the load – especially where parcel deliveries were concerned. So we find the railway companies – and their road transport competitors – were major

The body on this 1920s AEC is something a bit more clever than a standard canvas tilt – it seems to consist of two sections, with the rear part designed to slide forward over the front portion, to facilitate loading by an overhead crane – which, before the invention of fork lift trucks, was the only form of ‘mechanical handling’ on offer. Still on solid tyres, this fixed-sided body was used to deliver heavy cast iron ‘Main’ gas stoves. Alas, we can’t identify the manufacturer of this clever example of specialised bodywork but, sadly, one minor contact with ‘the scenery’ would have rendered it useless.



History doesn't tell us what happened to our friends, Moyle & Adams – or why exactly their 'Foodville' shops failed to follow the success of J Sainsbury. But perhaps that was the answer? Maybe J Sainsbury offered a better service, or a more attractive 'brand'? To distribute foodstuffs to Foodville stores, Moyle & Adams used this Guy chassis, fitted with a dropside body with roof canopy and sliding side curtains. It's clearly seen some life – this photograph was apparently taken as late as 1940.

Here's a classic example of a fixed-sided body with tilt. About to be delivered to W. Hooker & Son of Westgate Mill, Canterbury in Kent – no easy drive from Shrewsbury – the photograph of this brand new Sentinel 'S-Type' six-wheeler seems to have been 'enhanced' by the skilful efforts of a retouching artist. It does help underline the point, however, that smart bodywork is the, er, 'ideal' place to promote your company. "This handsome big capacity van body," the official Sentinel press release exhorts, "is one of the features that is proving very popular with the milling trade."

Here's a Leyland 'Rhino' that might well have passed the Sentinel S6 of W Hooker & Son on it's way down to Kent. New in 1931, we don't know what the fixed-sided tilt body was designed to carry, who built it, or who ordered this impressive 'big beast'. But apart from that...

operators of lorries with tilt bodies.

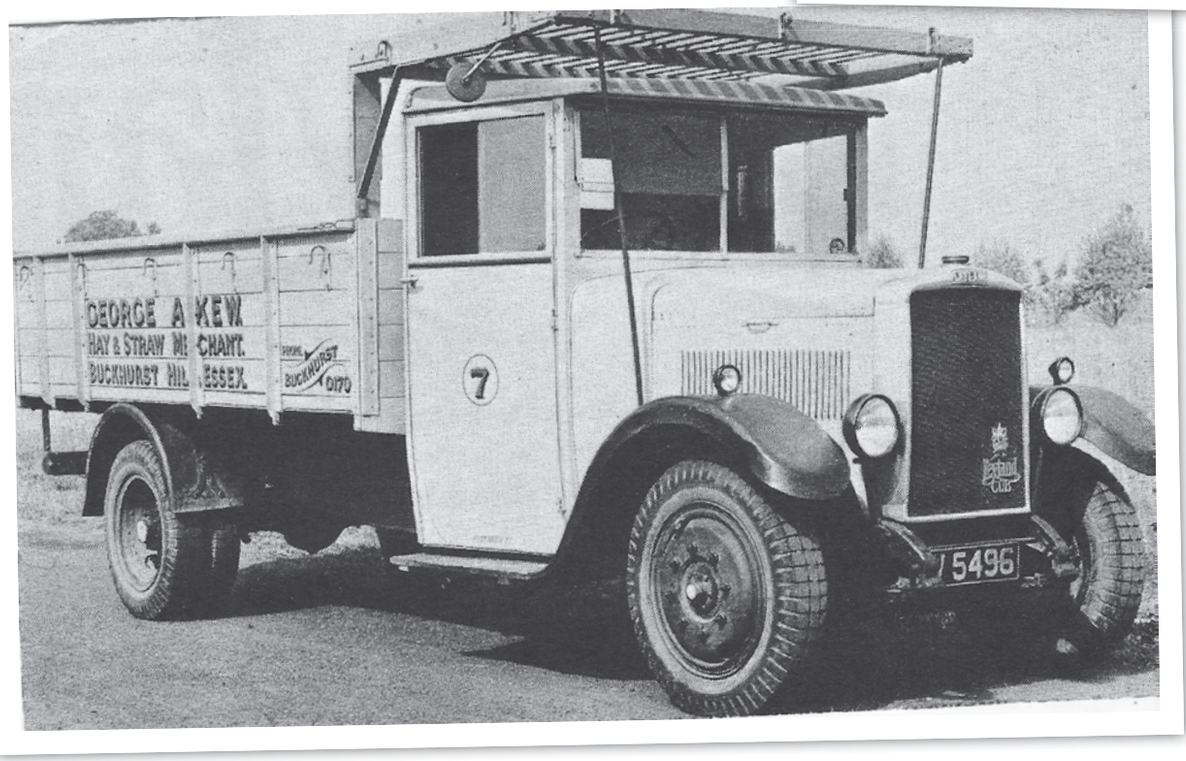
Market traders (no, not the ones who now inhabit the Square Mile, the ones that traditionally helped feed us all) had a different requirement – a body that had the capacity to take a load of fresh produce and transport it from the market gardens around major cities like London and into the market each morning, in order to get the best price. A Luton head to take those final crates of sprouts, maybe? Or a built-out rave with stake sides to prevent boxes of tomatoes falling overboard on the 'orbital'?

The job of the market gardener's body was simple – to get a load that looks too big for a 7-tonner onto a little 3 or 4 ton chassis.

Shouldn't be a problem.

▲ This well-used 1934 Leyland, TE 6681, is loaded with new steel wheels, manufactured by Sankeys of Wellington, Shropshire – so well loaded in fact that the standard-looking dropside body has been given 'stake sides', to ensure that the heavy and unstable load is kept on board.

▼ Here's another example of fixed-sided body fitted with an over-cab extension to increase payload space. This Leyland 'Cub' is fitted with a five plank sided body with stout Luton head over the cab, to enable owner George Askew to get as many bales of hay and straw on as possible.



▲ This 1931 Albion, MV 6614, is fitted with a classic example of a market gardener's body, featuring partial stake sides and a Luton head, with steel supports running down to the front bumper, bolted directly to the chassis. Seen in preservation back in 1997, on the HCVS London to Brighton run, it would have been loaded sky-high with wooden boxes of fruit or vegetables back in the day – perhaps with the 'empties' on the Luton head above the cab.

➤ Here's a little Garner TW 60 from 1933, a six-wheeler fitted with a dropside body, with sliding foldable tilt. When folded, this sits up against the front headboard, as seen here. It was, we're told, "A repeat order from TRTS".

➤ Another interesting example of bodywork that has survived long enough to enter preservation, this Leyland Badger with fixed-sided body with a canvas tilt was photographed in 1996 on the HCVS Trans-Pennine run. Note how the location of the spare wheel to the offside of the cab precludes a cab door being provided.

➤ Here's an excellent example of a nice new 'sheeted tilt body', as the note on the reverse of this official AEC publicity department photograph, confirms. This 'Mammoth Major' was built in 1936, for H A Newport, based in Fordham, Isle of Ely. Note that the timber dropside body is of substantial construction, using wider than normal planking. The rear bogie features elegant single unit 'seagull' mud-wings – surely one of the first examples? The tilt in this case has not been sign-written, so it doesn't tell passers-by that the company was engaged in haulage and distribution, but we do know that the company survived into the 1950s as a bulk haulier, although this vehicle was taken into the nationalised BRS fleet.

➤ Ah, at last! A photograph from the archives with some useful information on the back of the print! We’re told this 1932 Bedford is a 2-tonner and, as the sign confirms, it has a wonderfully detailed market gardeners body built by Super Line Bodies of Sugar House Lane, London E15. The customer is C J Burridge of Edmonton. Apparently known by his nickname, ‘Young Joe’, our Mr Burridge specialises in roses, trees and bedding plants, the signwriting informs us. Just one problems, you can’t phone him yet – this phone number has yet to be added!

➤ As we’ve already seen, fixed-sided tilt van bodies were indeed popular with ‘The Milling Trade’, as the Sentinel publicity department suggested. But was steam the right method of propulsion? Armstrong Whitworth, makers of considerable amounts of ordinance during World War I, clearly saw another option – the heavy diesel lorry – and formed an agreement with Swiss manufacturer Saurer, to assemble and market ‘Armstrong Saurer’ chassis in the UK. This photograph, dated February 1933, portrays AKE 628, an impressive ‘Dominant’ six-wheeler, for ‘Messrs Chitty & Co Ltd of Dover. It is fitted, we’re told, with an ‘Oil engine’ and a ‘moveable tilt body’ for the transport of Chitty’s ‘Superlative Self-Raising Flour’. Photographed on what looks like waste ground, the background has been airbrushed out by a retouching artist.

➤ Issued by the publicity department of Dennis Brothers Limited of Guildford, this picture seems to have been taken by a photographer based in Kingston-on-Thames – which is odd, because E C Smith’s depot is in Shere just five miles from Guildford. Could the bodybuilder have been located nearby? Alas, as is often the case, this official Dennis press release picture doesn’t mention the body – or why out of the three new chassis, only two have been fitted with tilt bodies while the third is features a dropside body. There’s clearly a considerable degree of owner’s pride involved, however – the three chassis are named ‘Condor’, ‘Eagle’ and ‘Hawk’. Nice touch.

1: A closer look at railway company-owned parcels and smalls delivery vehicles of the inter-war years will show that the fixed-sided tilt van was one of the more common bodies to be used for this duty – rather than 'proper' vans, as such. The tilt had the advantage of being lighter and, presumably, cheaper. Carter Paterson and, as here, Pickfords followed suit, as illustrated by this prewar Bedford, CGT 470, operating what was billed as the 'Suburban Goods Service'. This was no doubt introduced to help reassure commuters that once they moved out to a nice new 1930s 'semi', they could still benefit from the services they had in more central urban areas. The rear tailboard would drop down with a cut-out step to help the driver – or perhaps the 'van boy' – to gain access. The rest of the opening would be covered by a canvas curtain should it be raining.

2: This pre-war two-axle Dennis operated by E Cook & Sons of Portsmouth is is fitted with a sheeted tilt body with fixed sides. Built in 1933, it was used to transport fruit and potatoes up to London markets from Portsmouth.

3: In the darkest hours of World War II, this Fordson was part of convoy of lorries unloading sacks of what looks like grain at a large storage depot. Although once fitted with a sliding tilt cover, this now seems to have been removed.

4: HG 8705 was registered in 1946, this pattern of Dodge continuing in production post-war until replaced by the famous 'Parrot Nose' cab range. Quite why G B Hindle specified a stout Luton head for this otherwise standard platform body has, yes, you've guessed it, not been disclosed on the reverse of this official photograph. Perhaps a clue is Hindle's location in Bradford – and the fact that regular services are run to Liverpool and London, as well as Hull. Bales of wool or 'shoddy' are bulky so would require as much floorspace as possible. The substantial box on the side of the chassis would provide space for plenty of ropes to keep the load in place on the long haul over the Pennines.

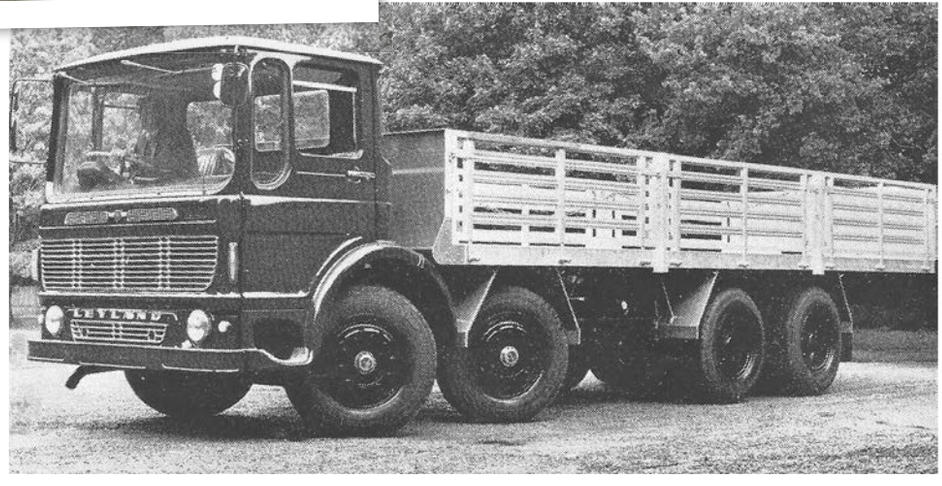
▲ Another fabulous market gardener's lorry that has reached preservation, this 30 cwt Bedford K Type, DTW 360, again features built-out stake sides, supported by metal brackets. And a Luton head.

▲ This rather austere Karrier Gamecock was delivered to Messrs Canning & Co Ltd in 1946. It features a special body with dropsides and a fold-away tilt, which is seen here folded against the front headboard. Canning supplied polishing machinery and materials and remained a loyal Commer/Karrier customer for many years. Sadly, the company was taken over by a German competitor in 1984, but a former employee still runs a spare parts service for Canning machines (trading as PW Engineering), suggesting they were long lasting!

➤ We're getting a bit more up to date now. This long wheelbase Thames Trader is a later model with the 'Trader' lettering set in the full width grille. The dropside body actually does look as though it was originally built with 'stake side' extensions (could they also be termed 'greedy boards'?) and while we don't actually get to find out what sort of trade Ellis of Oldcoates, Worksop, was engaged in, it's clear, the Thames did quite a lot of it!

▲ Here's another Dennis – an early post-war (1947) semi-forward control 'Pax' chassis, fitted with what amounts to a 'Stake-side' body – even tough it would never be referred to as such on this side of the Atlantic. Outside of a period Dinky Toys catalogue, that is. True, the 'stakes' on this example for brewer, Hall & Woodhouse of Blandford, are made of steel rather than being wooden 'stakes'. And they are hinged rather than fixed, but it is rare to find such bodies in the UK. At least until 'Elf and Safety' made the subject of load security such an issue!

▲ Here's a more modern 'take' on the sided body with tilt cover – Ripponden & District Motors ran a fleet of lorries featuring this design of body, long after other operators changed to curtain-siders or box vans. This 1964 Commer has reached preservation and was seen during the 1996 'Trans- Pennine' run.an issue!



➤ Here's a modern 'stake-side' body, built of aluminium produced in 1964, fitted to an 'Ergo' Leyland Octopus. Today one of the main users still using stake-side bodies is Calor Gas – although some builder's merchants like 'Build Base' have adopted the idea.

All Shapes and Sizes

ARTICULATED TRAILERS

We shouldn’t forget that semi-trailers – and, indeed, full draw-bar trailers – needed bodywork as well. But what helps make the transport industry such a fascinating business to study, is that there was no single ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ when it came to trailer bodywork. We start with the fact that several chassis manufacturers, at various times in their history, also built trailers. Sentinel, Scammell and ERF might be the three that come most readily to mind, but many other manufacturers produced trailers for military purposes both during and after World War II, including Shelvoke & Drewry and, indeed, one of the few remaining British-owned manufacturers left in this Country, JCB. Yes, as a visit to the JCB Museum in Rocester will confirm, the very first product manufactured by Joseph Cyril Bamford was a trailer.

THE PUREST AND MOST NATURAL FOOD.
ASK YOUR BAKER FOR BREAD MADE FROM EXTRA SUPER FLOUR.
OUR SUPER CREAM FLOUR MAKES TASTY HOME MADE BREAD.
WM SUTCLIFFE, TODMORDEN, 1923 LTD. MILLERS, STANSFIELD MILLS.
TEL. ADDRESS:- "SUTCLIFFE, TODMORDEN" TEL. NO. 12.
THE FLOUR WITH THE FLAVOUR.
WT-130

▲ This impressive Sentinel has been photographed at the back of the Sentinel works, rather than outside on the street, as usual. It features a distinctive drop-frame trailer, fitted with what looks like a bottom dump (by gravity feed) hopper, to carry ‘The Purist and Most Natural’ Super Cream Flour, milled by William Sutcliff of Todmordon. The hopper body is fitted with a sheeted cover and is of substantial riveted construction.

When it came to basic flats, dropsiders and van bodies, most trailer manufacturers seemed to produce their own bodywork – it was unlikely the end product had enough profit in it for two companies. But then, just to complicate things, a look through the archives suggest that a number of bodybuilders also built complete trailers!

It all adds to the wonderful mix that makes the road transport scene so interesting. ✣

▲ So, Eddie Stobart wasn’t the first road haulage contractor to name its vehicles? Here we see ‘Pioneer’, a Scammell articulated six-wheeler in the Fisher Renwick fleet. The trailer’s van body is built from sturdy tongue and grooved planking, set in a herringbone pattern and it is still running on solid tyres. Note the trailer features ‘Four-in-Line’ rear axles – or pair of twin oscillating axles, to be technically correct. This vehicle was ready for delivery in 1927.

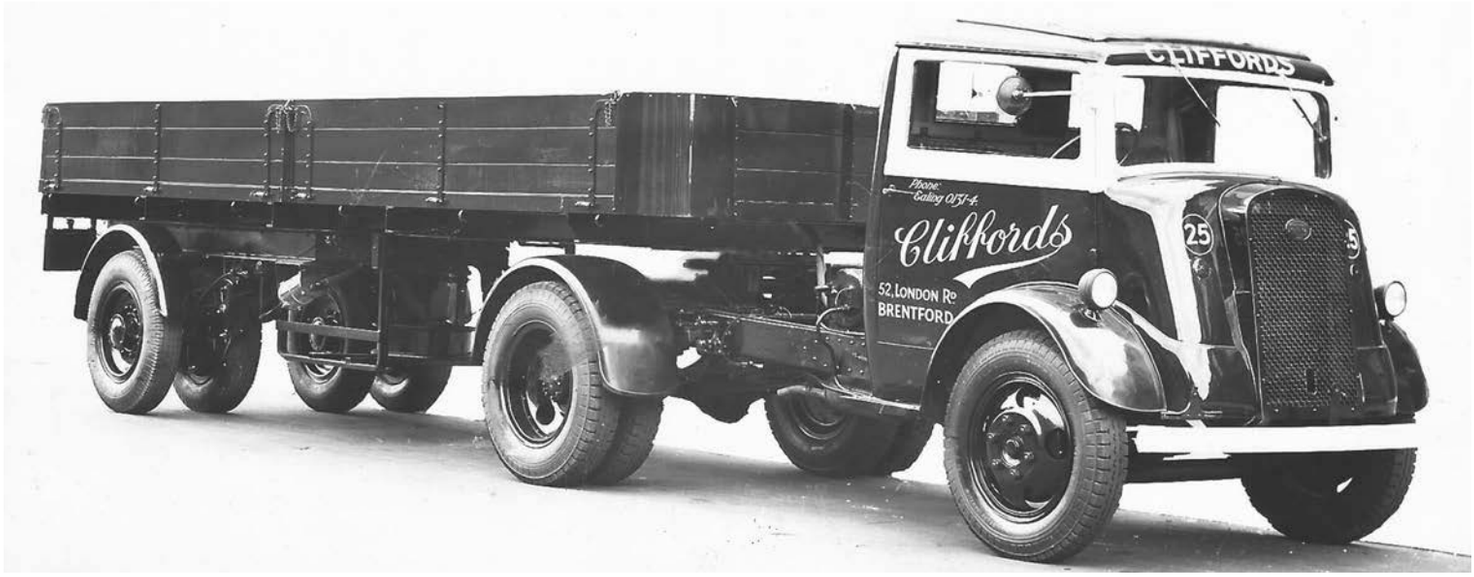
▲ **1:** Here's another Scammell articulated six-wheeler – this one features a trailer with drop-frame and dropside tilt body. **2:** Fisher Renwick was a long-standing Scammell customer. Here we see another named articulated six-wheeler, 'Curlew', which is an example from 1934/5 on pneumatics.

▲ During the inter-war period, Scammells were arguably the largest and most imposing commercial vehicles on British roads. Here's number 148 in the Currie & Co fleet, with typical 'bow-fronted' drop-sided semi-trailer. Low pressure 'balloon' tyres have been specified, but note an old-fashioned feature has been retained – chain drive.

➤ In contrast, here's one of the smallest and lightest articulated commercial vehicles to take to Britain's roads, the two ton Karrier Cob. Photographed by an official photographer working for Karrier Motors. This picture was published in 'Modern Transport' magazine, the ancestor of 'Vintage Roadscene' and shows that it was not just the railways that were interested in pensioning off horse-drawn transport – this unit is operated by Davenports Brewery of Birmingham. Speed was limited to 16 mph – just as well, with solid tyres on stone setts and a heavily loaded – but un-braked – trailer! Note how the original design of the Cob featured a narrow-track rear axle, to slot in-between the front axle of horse drays, lifting the wheels clear of the ground. This is actually a later, purpose-built trailer, but it works on the same principle – the 'turntable' was part of the trailer, not the tractor.

▲ This is a clever alternative to over-loading a normal control Ford chassis – specify an articulated trailer combination from the 'Truck & Tractor Appliance Company' of Manchester – and over-load it even further! Early Ford and, indeed, Bedford chassis were a popular choice for all sorts of methods to either increase payload or loadspace – or as here, both. So it seems all the more remarkable that they often took such punishment for years on end. Quite what purpose the young 'van boy' was serving perched-up on the trailer's sack load is hard to establish – maybe it was the safest place to be, should this loaded rig get brake-fade down a steep hill!

▲ We're in the early post-war era now. This Fordson is coupled to a new Dyson drop-frame machinery trailer with a 2 ft 7 ins loading height, featuring an eight-wheeled, twin-oscillating 'four-in-line' axle design. According to the press release information slip, the trailer has been designed to take a six to eight ton load which, with the weight of the trailer itself, would have given the side-valve engine of the Fordson something to think about!

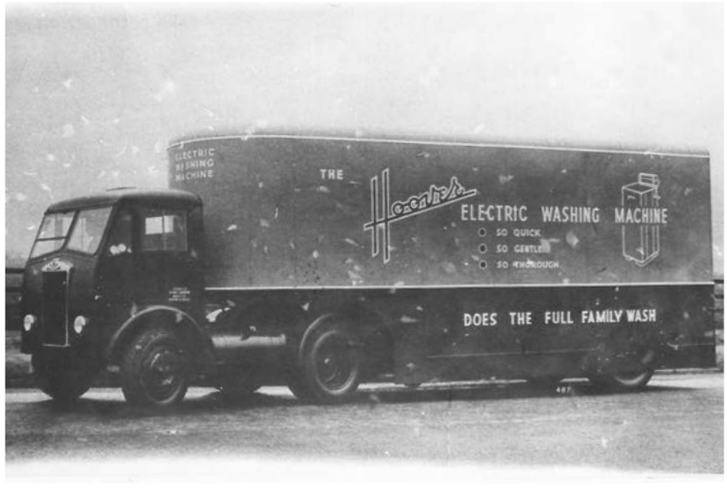


▲ Here's another new trailer and Fordson tractor unit operated by Cliffords of Brentwood, Middlesex. This one is a genuine 'Four-in-Line' unit, built by the British Trailer Company of Phoenix Works, Richmond Road, Trafford Park Industrial Estate, Manchester. It was built in 1947.

The nearest location that has wide-open green space to New Cross, where Long's Transport was based, is probably Blackheath, so this could be the location that photographers 'Bishop & Stray' selected, to record this rather neat Atkinson and platform semi-trailer, featuring a semi-bow-fronted design. It will only have been rated at 10 to 12 tons gross.

We're not told if this nice new York tandem-axle platform trailer is new to R H Millner Limited of Kirkham, or whether this company had a contract to deliver new trailers for York. Clearly, the ERF tractor unit wasn't new, and it doesn't look as though it has the right size tyres on the tractor drive axles, but then many operators ran what they could get, or they didn't get to run at all.

Canning was a regular operator of Commer chassis and here has specified a 10/12 ton tractor unit with a 25 ft long, single-axle dropside trailer with tilt to protect the load. It was build by Hands Trailers of Letchworth, Herts.



Sadly, not a good quality print, but this smart, bow-fronted semi-traler for Hoover is worth study, as it is heralding the start of a new era – the electric washing machine that, as the signwriting crows, "Does the Full Family Wash". The modestly-powered Albion tractor unit confirms that transporting washing machines wasn't that tough a job.

➤ The arrival of the forward control Bedford ‘S’ Type – or ‘Big Bedford’ – allowed General Motors to step up commercial vehicle production in Britain. Although oddly, petrol engines were available for longer than might be expected, the arrival of a Perkins replacement, the Leyland ‘Comet’ engine option and then, finally, Bedford’s own diesel, helped the S-Type win orders away from the traditional medium weight models from makers like Albion, Thornycroft and Guy. Here we see an S Type tractor unit with a BTC 10/12 ton trailer dating from 1954.

➤ Not every operator, it seems, wanted to move over to forward control Bedfords. Today, we just wouldn’t expect to see a normal control tractor unit, except on heavy haulage, but this Bedford TJ with Scammell coupling, operated by Wholesale Food Distributor, Kinloch of Stamford Hill, London (and Seer Green, Buckinghamshire) would not have been unusual in its day, at the turn of the 1960s.

➤ Here’s a later Bedford ‘S’ Type – note the revised radiator grille with larger lettering – with a van trailer, used to distribute foodstuffs to Burtons Supermarkets. Bedfords were also a favourite choice by larger high street supermarket rival, J Sainsbury at this time. But while Sainsbury’s superstores are everywhere today, we sadly don’t find the Burtons name on the High Street anymore.

Just to prove the point, here's another artic unit featuring a semi-normal control tractor unit – in this case a Thames 4D. The trailer is a four-in-line dropsider, which would normally be loaded with scaffolding, but here it has been transformed into a carnival float to celebrate 'Ye Olde Waye" of doing the job. Clearly, 'Olde' before 'Elf and Safety' was invented!

In the days before the 'EU' and the Channel Tunnel – and indeed, the 'Common Market' – exporting or importing goods direct by lorry was an adventure involving a ferry crossing. At that time, there would have been very few foreign-built commercial vehicles on the road – partly because of the dangers of having the steering wheel on the wrong side and not meeting UK lighting regulations, but also because it would have quite rightly have been seen as doing a British driver out of a job. The solution? For a while, it seemed like artic trailers suitable for both British and Continental tractor units was the answer – they could be shunted aboard a ferry here. And unloaded by a left hand drive tractor unit of an associate company, once landed on the Continent. Here we see a BTC 'four-in-line' semi-trailer, with dropside and tilt body for Continental Ferry Trailers Limited, based in Barking, coupled to an Atkinson tractor unit. The date is 1957.

▲ Also from 1957 is this Leyland ‘Comet’ tractor unit and box van semi-trailer for biscuit maker (since Georgian times, we’re told) Meredith & Drew. We might suppose that biscuits would hardly justify specifying a mid-range tractor unit, like this Leyland, but it’s worth remembering that, at the time, biscuits and crisps would have been delivered loose in metal tins, not wrapped in plastic packaging.

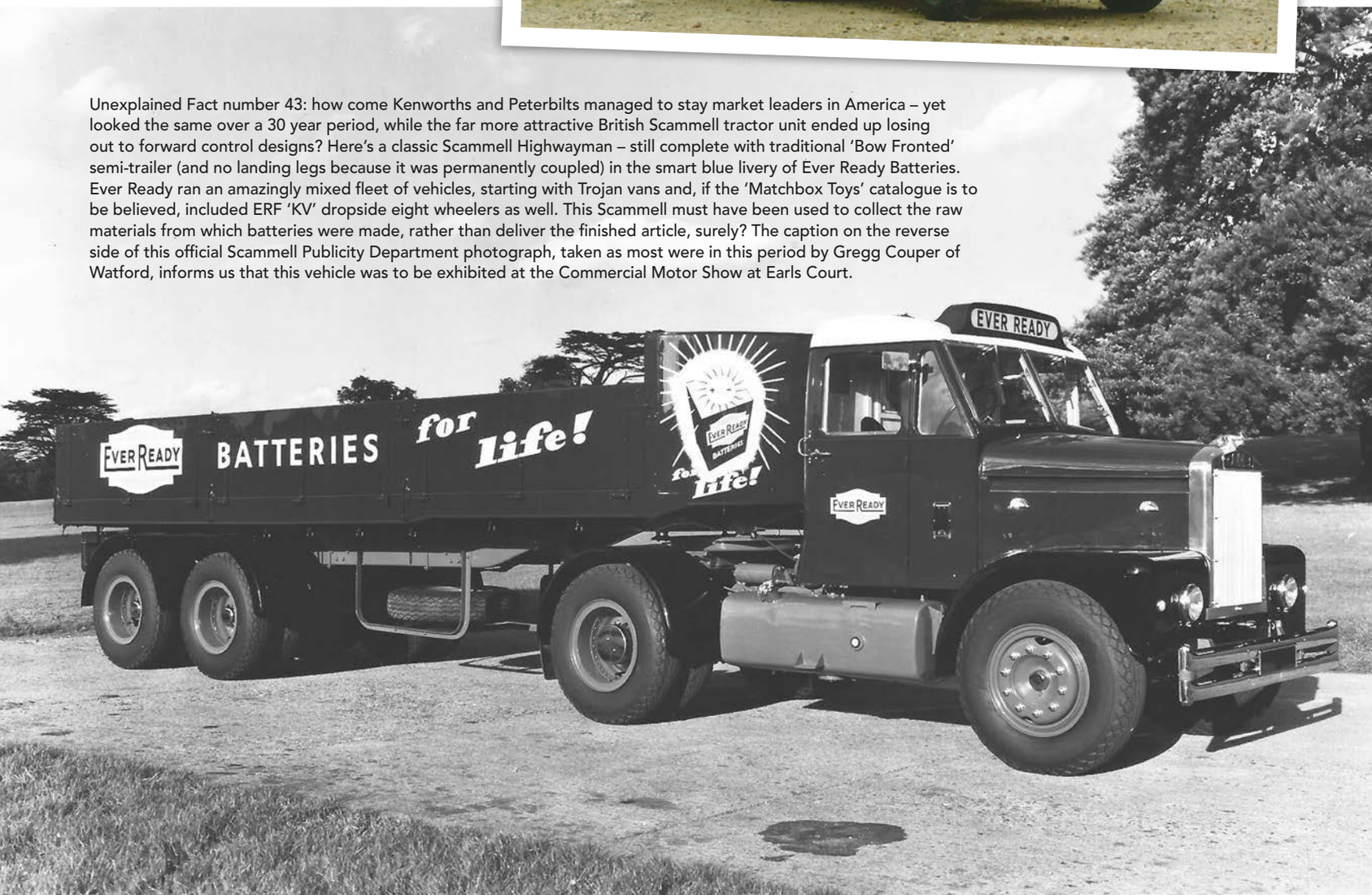
◀ Now here’s a proper job for delivering something of national importance - tea! Lyons ‘Quick Brew’ would have been just the drink for hard working folk, who had to get back to work after a fifteen minute tea-break. But we need to remember that ‘J Lyons’ also ran a network of ‘Lyons Corner Houses’. They provided an oasis of calm for middle-class mothers out shopping and men wearing hats and macintoshes ,at a time before teenagers – and coffee bars serving frothy coffee in glass cups – were invented. Note the trailer is again a four-in-line unit.

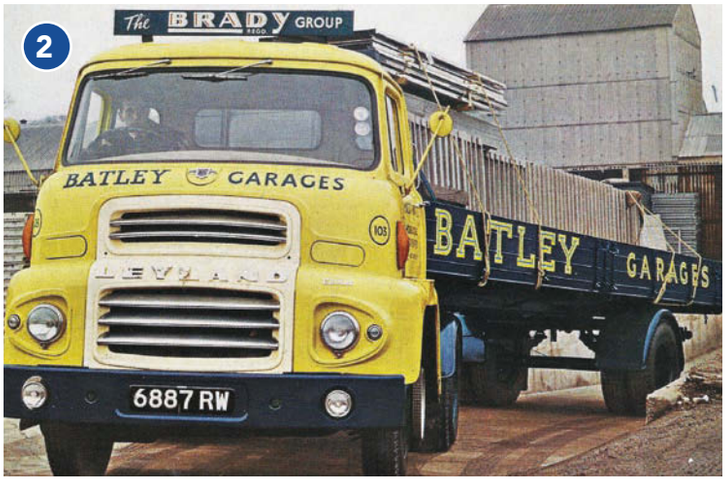
▶ Here’s another BTC Four-in-Line trailer from the archives – this one depicted in a joint promotional press release by BTC and BMC. The tractor unit is actually badged as a Morris. Quite what kinds of load this trailer for Bone Connell & Baxters was expected to carry is not explained, other than the fact that the Morris was due for a really hard life. Bone Connell & Baxters of Wishaw were steel constructional engineers and forge-masters, so whatever the load was, it was likely to have been ‘heavy’.

➤ The Lorry Driver of the Year Competition was one of those long-running events that tested the skill of the British Lorry driver to within an inch of his life, but sadly was also extremely boring to watch. It wasn't a spectator sport. In fact, things often moved so slowly, it was more a test of driver's endurance, rather than driving skill. Think of it as a cricket match. But with lorries. Here we see a couple of officials measuring the parking skills of driver Scroggins (not his real name) from Wall's. Normally of course, our Alf here would need to get a move on – any delay would see the load of ice cream melting onto the floor. Could that be happening here? "No, it's definitely Raspberry Ripple, I tell you..." explains one official to his mate...

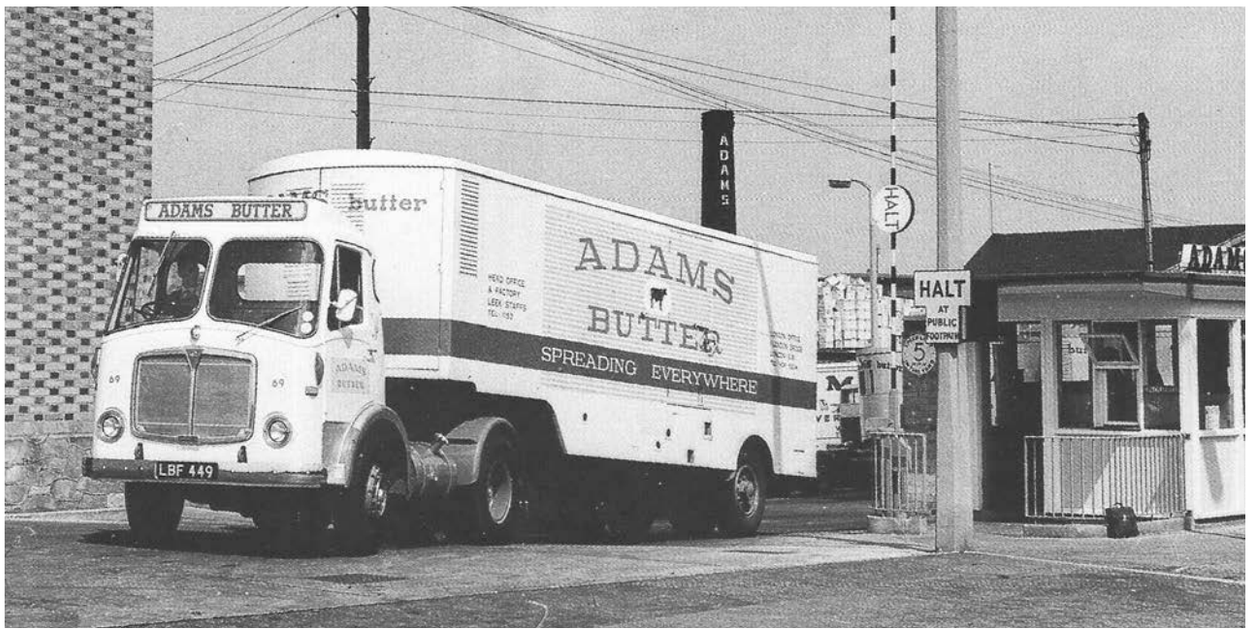
➤ The mainstay of the BRS fleet. Leyland Comets, Beavers and Octopus eight-wheelers really look the part in the traditional red of BRS, or Parcels green, don't they? Not flashy. Just businesslike – at least when they were new and as clean as the now-preserved TYO 210. The Comets would have been coupled to conventional single-axle 10/12 ton trailers – especially common in the parcels fleet, while the Beavers would work with short tandem-axle trailers operating at 24 tons gross. The four-in-line trailer had the advantage in that, as far as the law was concerned, the twin oscillating axles counted as 'two', which saved unladen weight.

Unexplained Fact number 43: how come Kenworths and Peterbilts managed to stay market leaders in America – yet looked the same over a 30 year period, while the far more attractive British Scammell tractor unit ended up losing out to forward control designs? Here's a classic Scammell Highwayman – still complete with traditional 'Bow Fronted' semi-trailer (and no landing legs because it was permanently coupled) in the smart blue livery of Ever Ready Batteries. Ever Ready ran an amazingly mixed fleet of vehicles, starting with Trojan vans and, if the 'Matchbox Toys' catalogue is to be believed, included ERF 'KV' dropside eight wheelers as well. This Scammell must have been used to collect the raw materials from which batteries were made, rather than deliver the finished article, surely? The caption on the reverse side of this official Scammell Publicity Department photograph, taken as most were in this period by Gregg Couper of Watford, informs us that this vehicle was to be exhibited at the Commercial Motor Show at Earls Court.

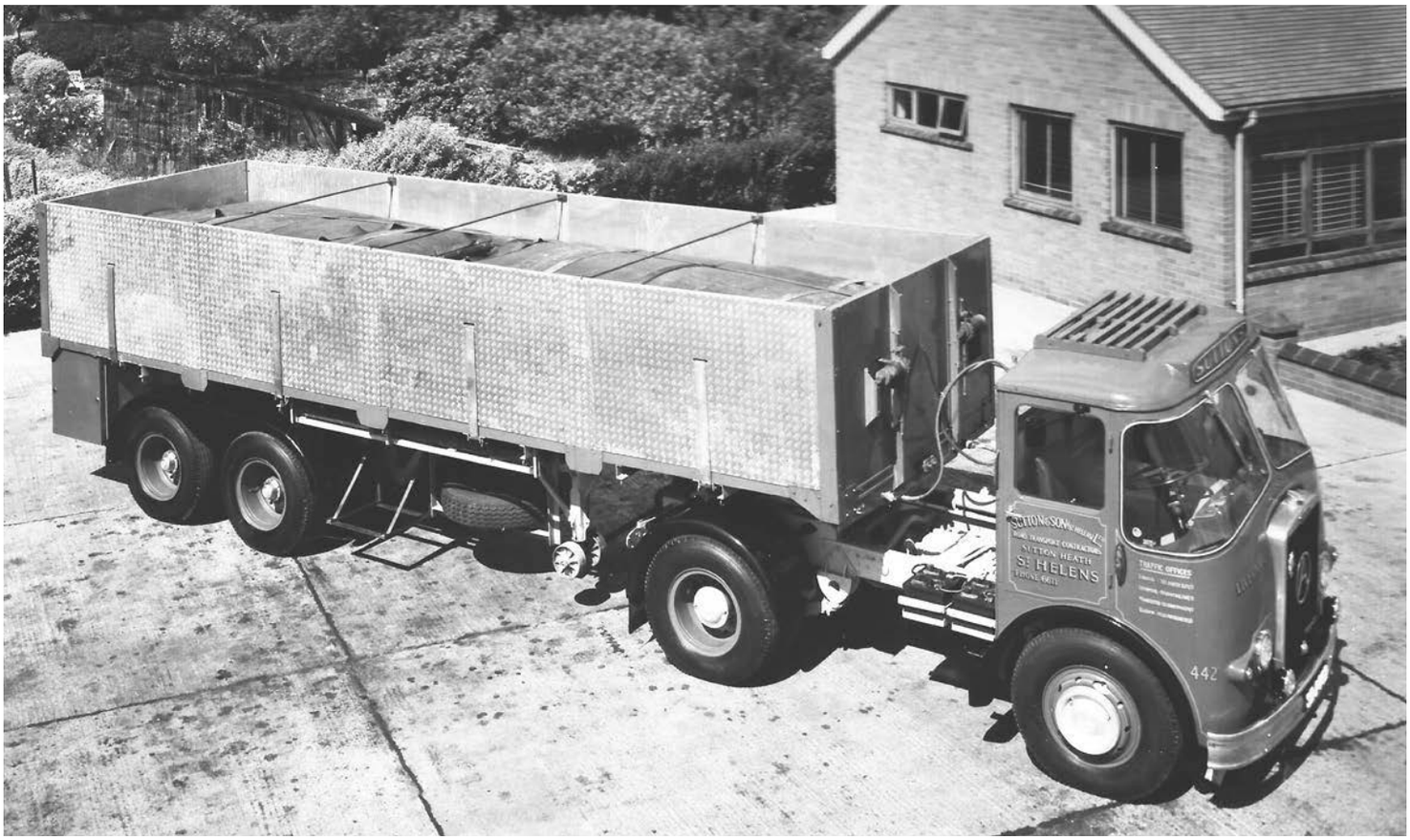




1: Guy was a favourite choice of chassis for Tate & Lyle until Guy went bankrupt and caused it to shop elsewhere – ultimately ending up with Mercedes. Tate & Lyle’s transport manager always seemed to be experimenting with different cab options and, in association with Guy, perfected the step ahead of front wheel-arch ‘long door’ version of the distinctive ‘Warrior’ and ‘Invincible’ cab. Before that, various other options were tried including this ‘suicide’ rear-hinged door on the otherwise standard cab. Warrior 286 EKC is coupled to a drop-frame four-in-line van trailer with side-located roller shutter door.
2: The growth of car ownership in the late 1950s and early ‘60s could be attributed to working people – at last – earning enough money to have a decent life. But more likely was the relaxing of credit controls, making it possible to buy a new car on ‘Hire Purchase’. But the big problem? Preventing the nice new car from rusting away, before the payments had finished. Which is where the likes of The Brady Group came in. Soon, the back gardens and unused corners of every suburban housing estate would be littered with rows of cramped Batley pre-fabricated garages. It’s 1962, and here comes a smart Leyland Comet tractor unit and 10/12 ton trailer with another load! **3:** This Bedford ‘TK’ tractor unit is coupled to a Scammell ‘Four Trak’ semi-trailer, about to be delivered to solid fuel distributor, J W Walsh of Hyde, Manchester. ‘Four Trak’ was the belated brand name of Scammell’s competitor to the BTC ‘Four-in-Line’ range. Scammell Trailers was having a surge of popularity at this time, which would ultimately result in that part of the business being sold out of the Leyland Group. Interestingly, this unit does the same sort of job – bulk delivery – as the Sentinel steamer at the start of this chapter. Although in this case, it has a bagging unit to enable smokeless fuel to be supplied to customers. **4:** This AEC ‘Mandator’ tractor unit is coupled to a single-axle fridge van trailer and looks the part in Christian Salvesen livery. It was photographed at the Commercial Vehicle and Road Transport Club (CVRTC) event at the Crick Truckstop in 1995.



Another AEC ‘Mandator’ with Park Royal cab. Another smart combination. This unit is leaving the Adams Butter factory at Leek, with a special consignment to add to the EU Butter Mountain. Twelve tons might not be much, but it was probably all Britain could afford at the time.



This Dyson trailer is something special – it looks like a sturdy dropsider – as indeed, it is, except that inside is a flexible tank compartment, to enable it to take a liquid load – the general idea being that the same vehicle could transport a liquid load in one direction and pallets of goods as a backload, presumably. History will show, the idea didn't catch on – possibly because the empty tank membrane was difficult to fold-up when empty?

It's nice to see that 'Tizer' has enjoyed a return to popularity recently – why should American brands of fizzy drinks take over the world? What is perhaps surprising here is that this load is being delivered on pallets on a flat platform trailer, not in a curtain-sider or box body, as we would expect today. There's another clue as to how times have changed – even as recently as 1973, when this Guy 'Big J4T' was brand new. Under that roped and sheeted load was a stack of plastic crates, containing ecologically-friendly glass bottles, rather than aluminium cans, which can only be 'recycled' once they've been collected from every roadside verge, as is the case today. The glass bottles? They carried a deposit and returning them often helped many young boys start a life in capitalism!

Is a Box Just a Box?

SWAP BODIES & DEMOUNTABLE CONTAINERS

Like the usefulness of articulation, the advantages of containerisation took far longer to catch on than, with hindsight, they should have done. Some commentators might blame recalcitrant union practices for trying to hold back progress. But it was just as likely that it was the unwillingness by senior transport industry management to 'see the big picture' and invest in specialised container handling equipment that was the cause. All the while labour was cheap? Why bother buying machinery? But there was arguably another reason – the railway companies and road haulage industry were both highly jealous of each other and saw no reason to co-operate.

▲ "Mind how you go..." A solitary Policemen looks on as Evan Cook's RAF Type Leyland heads-off with a container full of valuable Italian Art Exhibits. Still on solids, the Leyland does at least have electric lighting and a basic windscreen, but whether it qualifies as 'express' transport is open to question! This is a railway container, so we assume it continued the greater part of it's journey by train and ferry.

Another factor was the limiting potential of the British railway loading gauge – only the last main line built in Britain, The Great Central Railway – was built to the more generous Continental loading gauge and it required no great skill in investigation to discover that The Beeching Report (commissioned by road-constructing Minister of Transport Ernest Marples) recommended that, rather than invest in this route as a high speed freight line than might one day connect the industrial north to the Channel Tunnel (as Great Central Chairman Sir Edward Watkin had once hoped), it should instead be closed down.

The result? It's always been difficult for rail containers to be carried by road vehicles – partly because they had to be of heavy build to withstand shunting. While road-going containers to be made suitable for transfer to rail wagons – remember the 'Road Railer'?

But as the archives show, that didn't stop several pioneers from trying...

Here's another ex-World War I style lorry, loaded with a rail container and it looks like a bit of tight fit. Note that the container has been designed for slinging from a crane and has a payload of 3½tons. Taken in 1929, it seems this was some sort of experimental exercise, as there are no means with which to chain the container to the chassis.

This late 1920s Thornycroft operated by the Great Western Railway is carrying a standard railway container, with both side and rear loading doors. It is engaged on a farm removal job. Note how the container has been lashed to the deck of the platform body.

This ex-Hovis 1935 Leyland 'Beaver' is carrying a boarded container mounted on the platform body. Rescued from a showman, it is seen here on the Trans-Pennine run back in 1978.

The arrival of some swap-body technology at last? According to the original picture caption, it's December 1935 and we're in the Carter Paterson depot in Surbiton, Surrey. Everything is obviously brand new and what is being demonstrated is the ability of the overhead crane to lift one container over a line of other containers on the loading dock. The traversing crane only has a limited fore and aft travel, however – just enough to transfer the container onto a waiting chassis, by the look of it. Note how these containers are in fact swap-bodies – they are not 'multi-modal' railway containers. Unlike railway containers – which had lifting eyes at roof-level – these are slung from the base.

Here’s another photograph of Carter Paterson’s swap body system in action – this time at the company’s City Road depot. The trailer has already received its body and a second swap-body is being lowered onto the lorry chassis. Unlike the containers used by the railways, it seems that Carter Paterson has designed a ‘skeletal’ metal frame on the chassis into which the swap bodies slotted.

We’re still on the railway and here we see one of the all-too-few examples of joint operation by our two major nationalised transport operations, British Railways and British Road Services. Apart from the missing dropsides, the 1948 Bedford OSS tractor unit, with single axle 8/10 ton platform trailer, is pretty much the prototype of the well-known yellow Dinky Toys model. The container has lifting eyes on the roof.

The railways continued to promote the advantages of containerisation after the war – such as greater security, reduced packing costs and no need to make loads weather-proof. But unless there was a suitably heavy crane at the customer's premises at either end of the journey, a lorry chassis – or at best a trailer – had to wait while the container was loaded or unloaded. Fixed cranes were obviously expensive, but it wasn't until mobile cranes became more readily available after World War II that the system had some flexibility. Here we have a photograph staged by the London Midland & Scottish Railway, showing a container being transferred from the trailer, pulled by a Scammell 'Mechanical Horse', onto a railway wagon. Sadly, the angle of the shot doesn't allow us the see more of the mobile crane, but we know the photograph was staged because the driver is wearing his best leggings and someone from 'management' has turned up wearing a hat!

Ready for the off? With a top speed unlikely to exceed 20 mph – even with a good tail-wind – there is no real need to chain down the demountable tank onto the load-bed of the Scammell's platform trailer. But then, if there was an accident, printer's ink would make a hell of a mess!

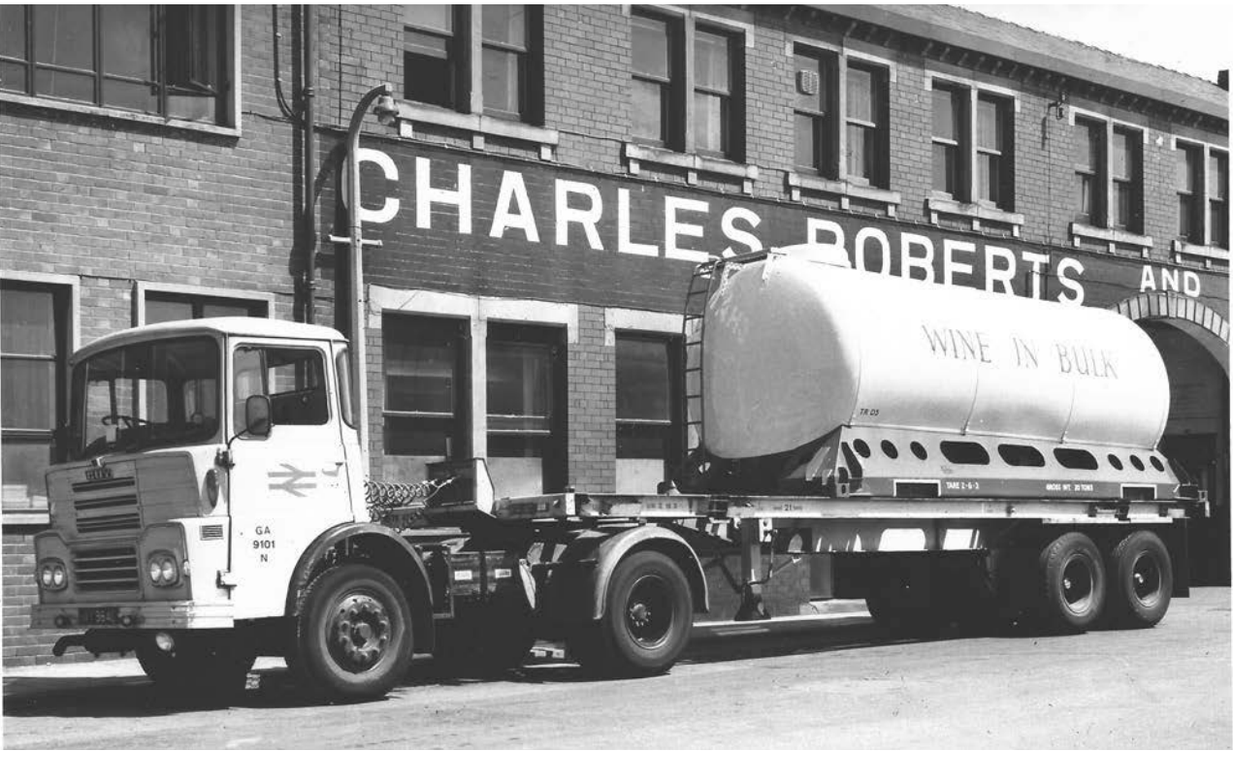
Ah! That's better. This is another sequence of photographs taken on behalf of the LMS. This time, we have an even more battered Scammell 'Mechanical Horse' being loaded with a demountable container for 'multi-modal' bulk liquid transport – in this case printing ink for the Manchester edition of 'The Daily Herald' newspaper. There must be at least 500 gallons of the stuff in there, so this would be some load for the little Scammell. The crane used for this exercise is a fixed yard crane.

▲ This looks a bit more professional. This 1954 Bedford S Type, operated by Middlesborough Ice and Cold Storage Limited, is loaded with a purpose-built ‘Hygienic Meat Container’ which, we can assume, was packed with ice – or at least insulated – as there is no provision for an on-board refrigeration unit.

▲ Here’s the same sort of principle, more than a decade on, in 1965. This demountable container for the transport of fish from the port of Hull was built by Barnaby, and mounted on a Guy ‘Warrior’ platform lorry operated by Les Barkworth. It was apparently painted in pink.

▲ This demountable body for meat transport was built by well known passenger vehicle coachbuilder, Reading & Company Limited of Portsmouth. The LAD-cabbed Dodge was also brand new when photographed.

At last, a multi-modal container system that actually worked. After several false starts (remember the 'Road-Railer'?) British Railways finally came up with the 'Freightliner' concept. Trouble was, it had taken so long, British Railways had changed its name to British Rail and lost most of it's potential freight business before the system became operational. The standard boxes could be transferred by traversing crane, as here, Boss sideloaders or large fork-lift trucks. But the limiting factor was the restricted load gauge on British railways. Only the former Great Central Railway mainline was built to a larger 'Continental' loading gauge – and the Beeching Report made sure that was closed down! Here in 1967, we see a new Guy 'Big J' tractor unit and trailer operated by Coales Transport of Chiswick, at the London Freightliner terminal, being loaded with a curtain-sided unit.



Was part of the reason why the Freightliner system failed to be as successful as it deserved to be down to lacklustre marketing on the part of British Rail? Possibly. This photograph formed part of a press release, describing the new bulk liquid tank container developed by Charles Roberts & Company of Wakefield. Designed to take 3,800 gallons – sadly not 4,000, which would have been better – this tank was developed to transport wine in bulk. Sadly, we're not told whether this was awful British wine to punish the French for unloading their overpriced stuff on us for so many years, or it was more imported plonk to add to our balance of payment crisis. We can see that the container has a modest tare weight of 2 tons 6 cwt 2 lbs and a gross weight of 20 tons, but after a couple more glasses of wine, who's going to care? The 1967 Guy Big J4T tractor unit is operated by British Rail and is coupled to a skeletal tandem-axle trailer.

LET'S GET THE SHOW ON THE ROAD

MOBILE SHOPS & EXHIBITION UNITS

This is where the bodybuilding craft comes into its own. It might well have been the case that, in the early days, any local bodybuilding company would have been able to turn its hand to just about any job – in the same way that a country blacksmith would be able to fix a plough as well as shoe a horse. But as the benefits of a eye-catching mobile showroom became more obvious to gas and electricity boards, for example, and mobile shops helped provide a vital service, in the rapidly expanding pre and post-war housing estates, at the time when very few households had access to a car, let alone two, and bus services were not as frequent as we like to remember, bold specialist body designs would help promote business.

▲ Top: A schoolboy's dream? As everyone knows, the immediate postwar period was one of continuing rationing and restrictions, with very little entertainment for those who couldn't afford the 'luxury' of a black and white television set with a ten inch screen. So the arrival in the area of this Mobile Exhibition unit, packed full of exciting stuff that could be found in 'The Eagle' comic, had to be a big occasion. It's 1953, and the location is sunny Clacton-on-Sea. Although, having said that, there is little evidence of sunshine in this picture. Drawn by a sturdy Bedford OSS Type, the trailer may well be full of 'Modern Wonders' – as the signwriting suggests – but sadly we can't see them, as the entry steps and information panels are on the other side of the vehicle. The bow-fronted trailer looks pretty stylish, but the big question is, what was that huge Eagle fixed to the Bedford's cab roof made of? Cast bronze – or that modern 'wonder material' glass fibre?

And at a time when British manufacturers were confident enough and well-enough funded to boost trade in other overseas markets? The mobile showroom or mobile training school, mounted on a suitably spacious lorry or passenger vehicle chassis, was an excellent way of promoting the brand, with organisations from car, lorry and tractor manufacturers, to aircraft, machine tool manufacturers and consumer goods makers all commissioning special display or promotional units.

Closer to home, the local banks – at a time when only middle and upper class people had bank accounts – would take mobile banks to agricultural shows, in the hope of signing-up farmers and local business people with a loan. Likewise, brewers would commission mobile bar units. But what young boy could have resisted the sight of a mobile exhibition unit promoting 'The Eagle' Comic?

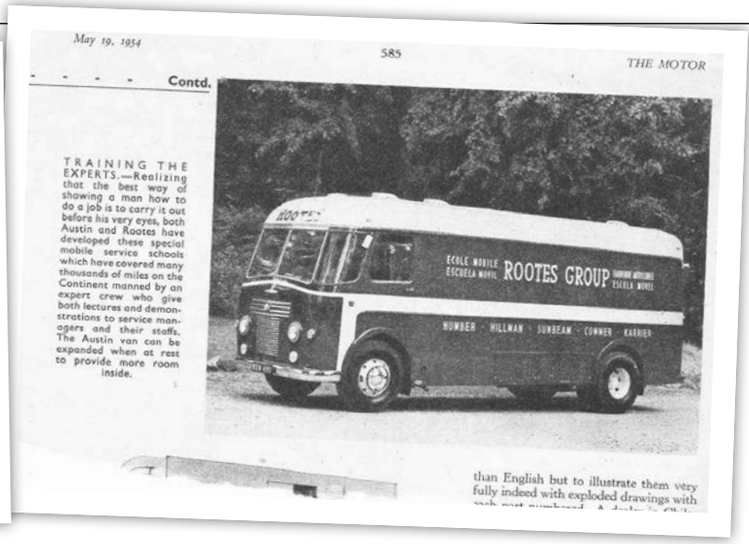
How could it possibly get better than that?

▲ Above: Sadly, the legal lettering on the nearside of this stylish body on a Commer van chassis is too small to be legible, but the raised roofline with opening ventilators rule out it being a 'Black Mariah'. It's rather more stylish than most mobile shop or display bodies, so it could be a delivery van for a posh London store like Harrods. EVP 936 was actually new in 1939, but the same basic chassis was also produced in the early post-war years.

Gregg Couper & Co, was used regularly by Scammell Lorries to photograph new motors beside the allotment fence in Tolpits Lane, Watford. But here the job was to photograph a Scammell product that was actually in service. In fact, this little Scarab with mobile shop trailer bodywork seems to have been in service for a quite while judging by several 'dings' and scratches on both the Scarab and the rather stylish trailer. Hanbury's Bolton-registered Mobile Grocery Shop is seen here visiting a then newly-built post-war housing estate. At a time when bus services were being cut back, but before every household had a car, taking the shop to where the houses were located seemed like a solution and a semi-trailer like this one had the advantage over a rigid van of a lower floor height.

One of the most enduring 'Mobile' units in both urban and rural areas is the mobile library. This one has a 'patch' a little bit further afield than your average local council unit here in the UK, however. Based on a Commer Avenger chassis, it was built for service in South Africa. 'Kaapse Provinsiale Adminstrasse' is Afrikaans for 'Cape Provincial Administration'. It was supplied in 1960 and would probably involved the Crown Agents – a government body with the task of overseeing export arrangements with first 'The Colonies' and then the Commonwealth. What we're not told is whether the bodywork was supplied here in the UK, or if it was locally produced.

We know that the bodywork for this mobile library was built by Barnaby and it is based on a Bedford coach chassis. The customer was the East Riding of Yorkshire County Council and it features a low step entrance just forward of the rear axle, with access from the cab into the main part of the body.



May 19, 1954 585 THE MOTOR

Contd.

TRAINING THE EXPERTS.—Realizing that the best way of showing a man how to do a job is to carry it out before his very eyes, both Austin and Rootes have developed these special mobile service schools which have covered many thousands of miles on the Continent manned by an expert crew who give both lectures and demonstrations to service managers and their staffs. The Austin van can be expanded when at rest to provide more room inside.

ROOTES

ECOLE MOBILE ESCUELA MOVIL ROOTES GROUP

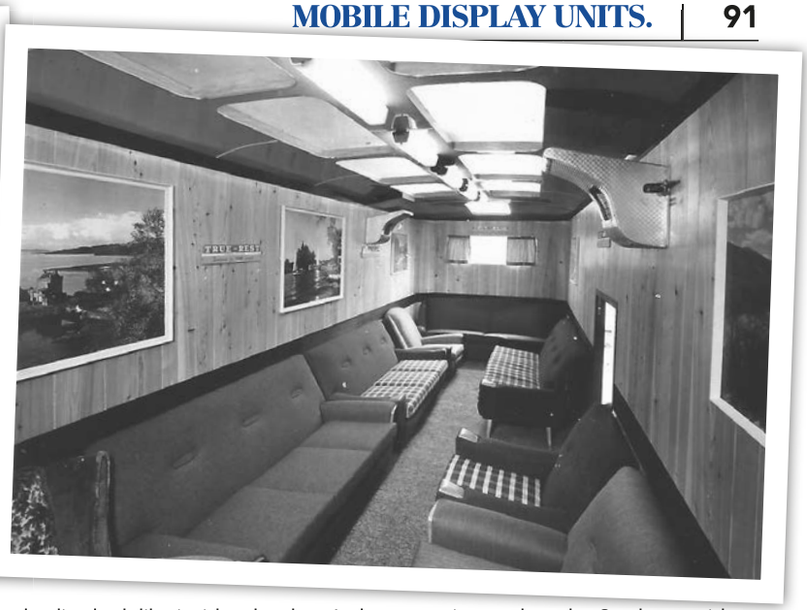
HUMBER · HILLMAN · SUNBEAM · COMMER · KARRIER

than English but to illustrate them very fully indeed with exploded drawings with

Above left: Here’s another Commer. This time, rather than a mobile training school, it’s a ‘Mobile Acoustics Laboratory’, commissioned by the National Physical Laboratory at Teddington, Middlesex. The design of the bodywork – we’re not told on the official caption which bodybuilder was responsible – has an attractive mix of Commer lorry front grille and coach-like wrap-round front screen. Above right: The Rootes Group was known to be good at sales promotion – even if, mechanically, most Rootes cars were pretty unexciting, with side-valve engines hanging on for far longer than they should have. The same conservative engineering couldn’t be said to apply to the commercial vehicle range however, where the two-stroke ‘TS3’ engine gave Commer lorries levels of performance equal, or better, to anything with a conventional diesel of twice the capacity. That would give us a clue to the soundtrack behind this smart new Mobile Training School which was commissioned to help train... well ‘foreigners’ essentially, how to repair British Rootes Group cars sold into export markets. This unit was widely travelled around Europe. Clearly, the policy must have worked – because a generation later ‘they’ were building cars that were so good that they put all the British manufacturers (except Morgan) out of business or purchased our better brands! This picture was reproduced in the May 19th edition of ‘The Motor’ in 1954. Before the rot set in.

➤ Here’s another Bedford VAL chassis with mobile display bodywork – this time it’s for the Natural Gas Information Centre. The body has hot and cold running water and a 240volt generator for lighting. The front end design looks very much like that of the contemporary Harrington ‘Grenadier’ coach body.

The Bedford ‘VAL’ coach chassis also had quite a following amongst operators seeking a lightweight van body with plenty of ‘cube’. The ‘Chinese Six’ wheel arrangement was, aside from a few pre-war Leylands, unique in the PSV market, although several brewers and Tate & Lyle Sugar specified some twin-steer mid-range Bedford TK lorry chassis, to provide the right mix of body length, payload and manoeuvrability. Here we see another application for the Bedford VAL – as mobile display unit for one of the Electricity Boards, prior to mass privatisation. Built in 1967, it has a separate entry and exit – were they expecting that much of a rush of punters keen to sign-up for a new cooker?



▲ Frustratingly, we don't often get to see what special display and exhibition bodies look like inside – but here's the exception to the rule. On the outside, we see that this smart mobile furniture showroom body has been constructed on a Bedford coach chassis for 'True Rest Upholstery', based in Glasgow. Built in 1965, it seems that the roof assembly is of GRP construction and that the same component was 'borrowed' from an existing passenger vehicle body, as the corners of windows can be seen, just below the cant rails. Was it by Alexander? On the inside, a number of different 'contemporary' fabrics and styles are installed along the length of the main saloon – all finished-off with some trendy pine panelling and pictures of Highland scenes. Mmm – nice!

◀ The Worcester-based Carmichael family dynasty had a number of business interests, including car dealerships and the production of bulk powder tankers and firefighter vehicle bodywork – or 'top hampers' as the industry called them. But Carmichael also had a vehicle bodybuilding organisation – and later took over Benson Bodies in the Black Country. Here we see another type of high profile body – that of a racing car or motor-cycle transporter and mobile workshop. Based on a full-length AEC coach chassis, this unit was built in 1970.

▶ Once upon a time, Britain had a natural resource that we'd got for nothing. All we had to do, was dig it out of the ground. Unlike oil, which we needed to buy off foreigners who treated us badly, coal didn't use up foreign currency. It was cheap to buy and the industry employed lots of British workers. What could possibly go wrong? Students of social history, please discuss... Here we see a Mobile Laboratory, commissioned by the National Coal Board to assess soil samples and if required analyse samples at accident sites.

Umm, the Royal Bank of Scotland. Clearly there is no hint of future disasters and mis-selling back in 1969, when this rather fancy mobile exhibition unit was commissioned. The bank could have specified a Leyland or AEC tractor unit, but being the prudent Scottish bankers they were (at the time), they settled on a modest Bedford TK. There’s a bit of “Hey boys, let’s kick off and have some fun” about the rather extensive use of polished alloy ribbing and the panelled-in rear wheels on the tractor unit but, overall, it was smart and businesslike. Bodywork was by the SMT bodybuilding department.

Here we see the trailer with the Bedford detached, showing the double outward-folding doors and what seems to be a sturdy wooden banking counter. The unit was probably used at regional agricultural shows, where bank-client meetings were likely to be more about long-term loans for local farmers and businesses.

Here the Bedford has been coupled-up again and the unit is ready for the off. The rear end of the trailer seems to feature a rear lounge seating area – although this was not designed to be used while on the move!

BECAUSE THERE'S ALWAYS SOMEONE WHO WANTS TO BE DIFFERENT

SPECIAL BODIES

It would be true to say that, if the road transport industry could get by with just half a dozen different body types, very few British bodybuilders would have survived as long as they did – or have. In theory, there has never been a reason why the chassis manufacturers couldn't have produced a series of complete vehicles, to be sold direct off their dealer's forecourts. The only one that had any degree of success was the Jensen – but that was because it was of chassis-less monocoque construction and, in any case, Jensen was primarily a bodybuilder that branched out into vehicle manufacturing, so it was the exception to several rules.

▲ By any stretch of the imagination, a mobile cinema was always going to be an application that had 'niche market' written all over it. But a mobile cinema commissioned by the Methodist Home Missions? What sort of films could they possibly show? Surely, all the best ones broke at least two of the Ten Commandments? Somewhere in the archives must be the answer to such questions as, believe it or not, this Mobile Cinema was mounted on a forward control chassis and delivered to 'The Methodist Missions.' It was featured in a Press Release by the Commer Publicity Department in Luton in June 1938.

In more recent times, Bedford, Ford (later still Iveco) and Leyland DAF all had agreements with body manufacturers to sell completed vehicles. Before that, Bedford and Ford had close working relationships with the likes of Spurling, Martin Walter and Walkers of Watford. But that still left plenty of opportunity for other bodybuilders to meet customer needs for 'something special'

Here are just a few that were found in the archives... ✣

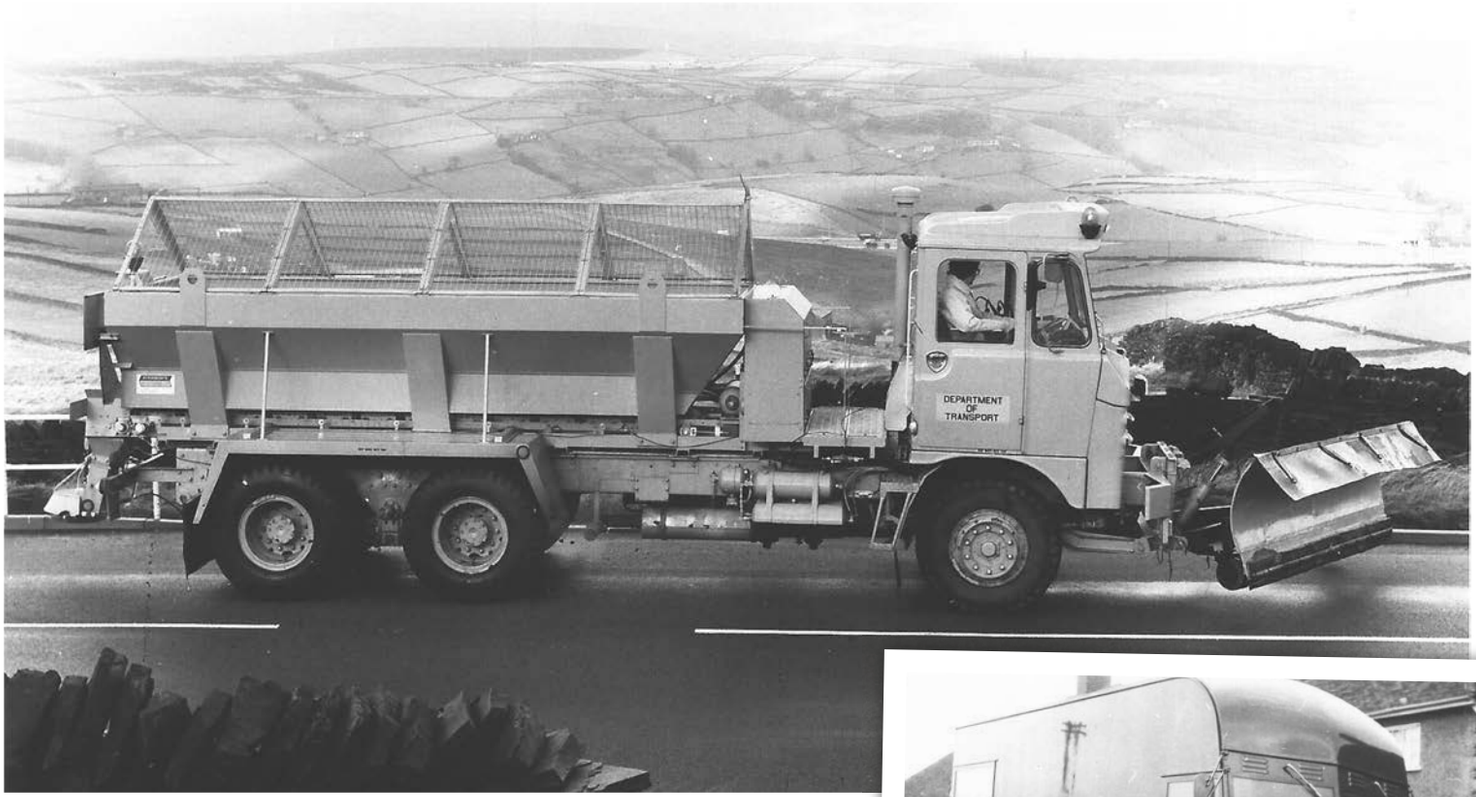
➤ Is this ‘special’ enough? This picture helps explain why lorry-mounted mobile cranes were not a viable option, until modern hydraulics enabled the manufacturers to ‘downsize’ the actual superstructure, while increasing lifting power considerably. A generation before the lovely, three-axle lorry-mounted Coles mobile crane – as modelled by Dinky Toys and featured in every schoolboy’s toy cupboard over a couple of decades – this rather awkward-looking crane from Smith of Rodley, Leeds, needed a four-axle ERF chassis to carry it – and only then if the rules regarding overall length and front/rear overhangs were looked at liberally! This unit was built in 1946.

➤ The post-war Dodge 100 Series ‘Parrot Nose’ chassis might have become famous as a result of starring in that black and white movie, ‘Hell Drivers’, but this picture reminds us that Dodge continued to try and carve out a niche in the passenger vehicle market as well. Bedfords sold equally well in both markets, of course, so why not Dodge? Alas, it was only among rural bus operators – with smaller bodybuilders, such as Thurgood – where Dodge had some success. Was it Dodge’s success with the Perkins diesel that worked against it in the passenger vehicle market? It certainly wasn’t because Dodge front end panelwork looked unattractive, judging by this smart coach body. Notice it features two offside emergency exits.

➤ The Military-pattern Bedford RL 4x4 could also be specified with a ‘civilian’ twin rear wheeled axle, as featured here on this new aircraft crash tender for the States of Jersey Airport. The photograph was taken on behalf of Vauxhall-Bedford ,by the local dealer in St Helier and, although brand new, it has already been loaded with all the necessary hoses and other equipment. A ‘proper’ airfield was a vital factor in increasing tourism in the Channel Islands after the end of World War II as, prior to it being built, the ‘runway’ was actually the beach at low tide!

1 Mobile platform (or 'tower') units have been specified by local councils for a number of reasons – to facilitate the renewal or cleaning of street lighting, as well as to maintain and service the overhead for tram and trolleybus networks. This Bedford M Type 3-tonner for the 'County Borough of Stockport is entirely typical of an age where 'in-house' labour was considered the best way of looking after local services. 2 Like mobile tower wagons, special rescue tenders didn't tend to cover high mileages and, as a result, lasted longer in service than many commercial vehicles. This smart Mines Rescue Unit for the National Coal Board is based on a Commer chassis and was built by bodybuilders, Kirkness & Inness of Edinburgh. It clearly had an emergency services role and we note that it featured sleeping accommodation for up to 14 rescuers – presumably so they could work shifts on major incidents without leaving the scene? The rescue equipment was carried in the side lockers and included breathing apparatus for the crews. 3 Like the terms 'Auxiliary Fire Service' and 'Civil Defence Corps', we don't see any reference to the 'Salvage Corps' these days but, in fact, local UK Fire and Rescue Services have to undertake a wide range of duties, whenever a national disaster takes place. This Commer 'Salvage Corps' unit was photographed by press photographer 'F A Fyfe' of George Street Building, Liverpool, on behalf of the Commer Publicity Department in September 1955. 4 Also photographed in 1955, this underfloor-engined Sentinel diesel has been specified with an eight cubic yard 'Jekta' body, which is made up of three sections which each fit inside the next. When activated, these move backwards, forming an unloading action, instead of the more conventional method of tipping. A number of different sizes and number of sections could be specified for situations where the height of a tipping body might present a problem. 5 The arrival of Britain's new Motorway, just a mere 30 years after deputations of British Ministry of Transport officials had visited Hitler's Germany, to see how it should be done, presented several operational problems that had never been encountered before. Not least of which was finding a large enough capacity snowplough/gritter that could do the job at a reasonable speed, while covering all three lanes of each dual carriageway, without running out of salt between the junctions. After a prototype was built by Pagefield, it was Scammell that got the initial order – the end result being a unique mix of Highwayman radiator and front wings, fitted with a forward control cab featuring a 'reverse rake' front screen. The reason? In an age where the reliability of British vehicle electrics were already questioned, tests showed that the screen wipers would work better if the snow had already fallen off the screen as a result of gravity! Although of four-axle design, the second steer-axle wasn't driven, making the chassis an 8x6. The gritter bodies were built by Atkinson of Clitheroe, Lancs, and featured side-mounted spinners for the salt, so as to give maximum coverage over all three lanes, with the vehicle located in the middle lane. 6 The use of air – or vacuum – power to load or unload commercial vehicle bulk bodies has been around for a while, but has still failed to catch on outside certain industries. The cost and complexity of PTO installations and added cost and weight of the bodywork even held the idea back in agriculture and the milling sector, until the rising cost of manual labour made hand-balling hessian sacks less cost-effective. Here then is the solution for the bright new 1960s – a Thames Trader 7½-tonner, with 'BulkFlo' pneumatic discharge body by Dunn Spencer of Taunton. But to help ensure that the chassis can be used for other transport operations – like loads of sacks from farmers who refuse to accept change – the 550 cu ft alloy 'Bulk Container' is demountable from the pine-boarded platform body.

▲ With the demise of the Scammell brand and the closure of the Watford works, both Atkinson Vehicles and Foden had a crack at the motorway snowplough/gritter market. While Foden would develop both three and four-axle all wheel drive chassis for military applications, a 6x4 model with cross axle diff-locks was considered suitable for the task. Featuring a 265 hp Rolls Royce diesel engine and a Foden nine-speed gearbox, snowplough and gritter equipment was supplied by Atkinsons of Clitheroe. A special Foden S85 cab was fitted and the chassis fully rust-proofed, according to this caption on the reverse of this press release photograph. It was issued by the ‘Foden Information Unit’, based at 10, Hanover Street, London W1.



▲ Here’s another photograph of one of the Foden snowplough gritters supplied to the ‘Ministry of Transport’, at time when Government departments were actually responsible for getting work done, rather than wringing their collective hands and ‘calling for an inquiry’ when ‘out-sourced’ labour, working for contractors, gets it wrong. Unusually for a photograph of snowplough, there actually seems to be a dusting of snow over the Yorkshire Moors when this picture was taken!

➤ Here’s another Thames Trader with special body – this one is a reinforced ‘Cash-in-Transit’ – or more likely a Bullion van. Note there is no cab access door.

1 It wouldn't have been possible to stroll up to this special AEC transporter when it was in service with the MOD, as the photographer would probably have had his camera confiscated! Built to handle the British 'Blue Steel' missile, these units, constructed by Cuthbertson, featured a distinctive half cab. How many have survived? 2 These special 'Aircraft Commissary Vehicles' (as they were rather pompously called) were – and still are – used by the airlines to restock aircraft after each trip with plastic food in plastic packaging – apart that is from first and business class 'customers', who at least get treated with a bit of respect. This Commer-based commissary unit shows off the substantial scissor-lift construction, used to raise the loaded body to the height of the aircraft door and the way in which the trolleys are wheeled into the aircraft by a drop-down ramp. At the rear is a conventional chassis-mounted tail lift for loading back at the catering depot. This unit was built in 1967 – and was modelled, very badly, by Budgie Toys. 3 The Ford D Series was a popular choice of chassis for the third-axle conversion specialists, giving improved payloads for a modest weight increase. But this three-axle D-Series has another priority – a good payload, with added stability within a restricted overall height to the top of the cab roof, to enable it to service aircraft. The solution? It looks like a combination of smaller diameter D300 wheels and tyres and... well, slicing the roof down to a flat sheet just above the gutter rail, by the look of it. The units were built in 1978 by Ford main dealer, Tricentrol of Dunstable. 4 Pneumatic loading – or more likely, unloading – didn't really catch on in many industries for a number of reasons. And it still hasn't today, in such areas as demolition, where even large piles of brick and rubble can be loaded in a dust-free manner far faster than by hydraulic loader and tipper. And here's another application that didn't catch on – bulk coal supplies by 'tanker'. "Pneumatic Delivery Direct to Store" proclaims the banner on the side of this AEC Marshal 'Ergo' six-wheeler, which sounds fine – provided your store had somewhere to, er, 'store' ten tons of coal. 5 And finally... Even if you're not in any way religious, you have to admit, things don't get much more special than a visit from the Pope. Britain – a protestant country that broke away from the Catholic Church several hundred years ago, note – went to a great deal of trouble to welcome the Pontiff to this country in the 1980s. This included constructing a rather over-the-top Range Rover and this even more over-the-top C40 Leyland 6x4 'Constructor', with an admittedly stylish single-seater body. The styling was done by Ogle Design of Letchworth, but who paid for it all? Did one man, however Holy, need a 26 tonne gross chassis to carry him? No of course not – a Leyland 'Roadrunner' would have done just fine. But it was all about putting on a good show, apparently...

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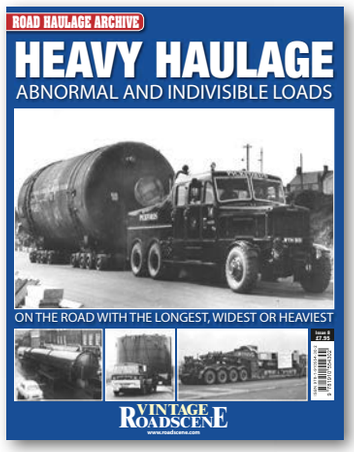
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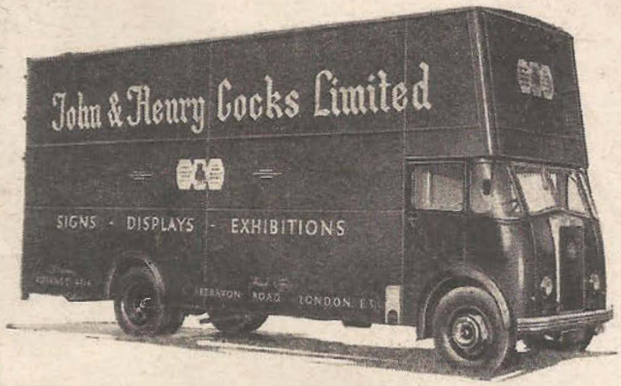

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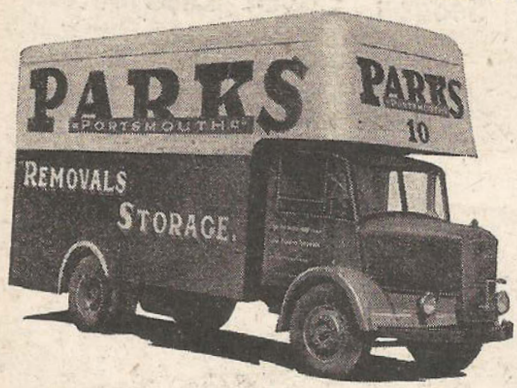

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